

CREATING DISCIPLING CULTURES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
SHARED METAPHOR

A THESIS-PROJECT

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BY

PATRICK S. GRABENDIKE

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To my beautiful wife, Kara, my best friend in life and to Caleb and Chloe, the best kids for which a father could ever hope.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS



Original No Drop Ride Metaphor Image

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## Abstract

This thesis-project is intended to aid students and ministry leaders in creating discipling cultures through the development of shared metaphor. It includes the theological foundations for discipleship as well as the creative process of conveying said discipleship through creative language and visual tools. The project addresses the linguistic challenge Christian Churches can experience because of generational and theological differences. The project is the culmination of Westbrook Church's experience as it sought to create congregational ministry alignment by means of new metaphor which collectively expressed the mission of the Church of Matthew 28:18-20. It includes the collaborative effort of focus group participants, facilitator, as well as the author, Scott Grabendike. The conclusion is that a church community can elevate the expectation for spiritual growth and alignment through collaboration and the creation of a shared metaphor for discipleship.

## CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM IN ITS SETTING

I am not a big country music fan. I admitted this once to my preaching coach, Tom Nebel, and he gave me this challenge: “If you want to become a better preacher, listen to country music.”<sup>1</sup> He said, “You will find that many country music songs paint us a picture of life’s complexity and they do so in a couple of simple lines.” I reluctantly followed his advice and found the truth in his statement.

There is no better example than Miranda Lambert’s song, Automatic. In the song, she reminds the listener of an age, in the not too distant past, when things did not come as easily to us as they do now. The chorus beckons us back to a simpler day when things didn’t happen automatically:

Hey, whatever happened to waitin' your turn  
Doing it all by hand,  
'Cause when everything is handed to you  
It's only worth as much as the time put in  
It all just seemed so good the way we had it  
Back before everything became automatic.<sup>2</sup>

Ms. Lambert is not necessarily suggesting we go back to handwritten messages, crank windows and Polaroid cameras, but she is suggesting that we have all become a little too comfortable. The song reminds us that there are endeavors in life that are only worth the time we put into them. This has and always will be true.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Tom Nebel has served in a number of ministry capacities, most notably as a church planter, pastor, and regional/national/and international director of Church Planting for Converge Worldwide where he has been involved in the planting of over 800 new congregations. He has authored six books on the subject of starting new churches, most recently *Leading Church Multiplication Locally, Regionally, and Nationally*.

<sup>2</sup> Lambert, Miranda, RCA Record Label 88883-79278-2, 2014, compact disk.



If we were honest, we would admit that our expectation for the Christian life is that it should be automatic and effortless. The Christian life is much more like a manual transmission on a car. A life of faith and love in Jesus requires labor, effort and constant attention. As Dallas Willard has stated, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is attitude. Effort is action.”<sup>3</sup> In our active response to grace, we sometimes get it wrong; we can grind the gearbox, stall, and sometimes miss shifts, all while trying to get the vehicle moving toward a life of increasing obedience. Discipleship is not automatic.

My thesis is creating discipling cultures through the development of shared metaphor. This thesis-project is centered in my eight years as senior pastor of Westbrook Church in Hartland, Wisconsin. I am no longer the senior pastor of this church. Technically, it no longer exists because of a church merger that I initiated with the sending church that planted Westbrook 34 years ago. I am grateful for the amazing people who labored together in love and provided a living representation of the love of Jesus to the surrounding community. Our eight years there were not automatic, but they were definitely worth the time we put in.

This thesis is an attempt to make sense of how one church labored together to live out the Great Commission within its context. As we discussed how to make disciples, we recognized we had to first define what we meant by discipleship. The problem we experienced in our church was that we all agreed conceptually about making disciples as the aim of our church, but we often had very different understandings of what this meant. Most of our differences

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<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: Harper Collins e-book, 2006), 75.

revolved around our generational preferences rather than the biblical mandate and mission found in Matthew 28. These preferences were revealed in two primary differences in (1) methodology and (2) measurements.

Methodology: The older generations in our church (Builders and Boomers) preferred a top-down, mentor/mentee model whereas the younger generations (Generation X and Millennials) preferred a peer-to-peer approach. The church was almost equally divided by these two groups. The older generations felt unneeded by the younger generations. From their perspective, younger people did not feel a need to learn from the older generations. The younger generations desired to meet with older, more mature believers, but desired peer-to-peer relationships. Moreover, the older generations voiced a preference for more staff-driven church programs, whereas the younger generations preferred less structure and more relationally driven methodologies.

The assumption by the older generations was that if the institution supported a program for discipleship, people would naturally want to be a part of it. Conversely, the younger generations were more resistant to being part of anything that felt overly institutional. In their book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters*, authors David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons point out the suspicions that both Gen X ("Busters") and Millennials (Mosaics) have regarding institutions.

Being skeptical of leaders, products and institutions is part of their institutional coding (Busters tend to express skepticism layered with cynicism, and Mosaics do the same with extreme self-confidence). They do not trust things that seem too perfect, accepting that life

comes with its share of messiness and off-the-wall experiences and people.<sup>4</sup>

Similar realities created methodological challenges. For example, anything methodology we employed that felt too “produced” was automatically suspect by the younger generations. The younger generations preferred discussing the Bible over a pint of Guinness informally, rather than in a scripted form in a church classroom.

Measurement: The congregation also differed significantly on how we should measure discipleship and spiritual growth. The more institutional the thinking, the more burden placed on the leadership of the church, and the less burden placed on the congregation. Many in the church measured discipleship and spiritual growth based on numbers: how many seats were filled on a Sunday morning, and how much money people were giving. Some would ask the question, “What are we going to do to grow the church?” The assumption was that if the numbers increased, discipleship was happening, and if the numbers did not increase, discipleship was not happening. While numbers tell us something, they do not tell us the whole story.

The assumption made by the younger generation was more focused on questions like, “How are we going to be when we gather together?” In oversimplified terms, there were two questions:(1) “What size church do we need to be in order to keep the lights on?” and (2) “What kind of church do we want to be?” The first question was quantitative and the second qualitative. We needed

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<sup>4</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 22-23.

some kind of link to connect the generations concerning method and measurement of discipleship.

The differences of methodology and measurement became amplified because of the multi-million dollar facility that was completed shortly before my tenure as senior pastor. The previous/founding pastor left the church two years prior to my arrival, after the completion of the new facility. He stepped down as senior pastor due to conflict with the church leadership. Approximately half of the congregation left and joined other churches because of his departure, which caused a major fissure. This new facility left the congregation with significant debt. In my first few years at the church, the metrics naturally revolved around what we (the staff) were going to do to fill the facility with people in order to pay for it.

The church had not envisioned the extent to which a new and enlarged facility would change the overall direction of the church, and more specifically, what model we would adopt for discipleship. The church transitioned from a modest, multi-use facility that seated 500, to a new facility that could accommodate over 1400. The original facility required numerous volunteers to come every week to set up and tear down the chairs for the service. Prior to using the new facility, the ushers and greeters struggled to find space for everyone in what was affectionately referred to as the “sanctinasion”. Tight knit communities were formed around serving every Sunday. Prior to the construction of the new facility, the average Sunday morning attendance was close to one thousand attendees. Seating was tight and people were inconvenienced every

Sunday morning as they struggled to find an open seat. I heard from many in the church who stated that this was an exciting time in the life of the church, and the disruption of everyone's comfort actually caused the congregation to serve.

One of the unintended consequences of the new facility was that it created a heightened focus on the Sunday morning experience and sacrificed some of the community feel of the previous space. The stage was massive and provided a significant physical barrier between the preacher and the rest of the congregation. It left the impression that we were more concerned with "performance" rather than "participation." Predictably, the focus became attracting people to the Sunday morning experience so that the preacher could lead them to a commitment to Jesus. The assumption was that people's subsequent attendance would naturally result in disciples being made. Some of the discomfort experienced in the previous facility was replaced by a sense of comfort: an expansive space with new comfortable seats, with plenty of space between an individual and their neighbor. Ushers later admitted to me that they became less intentional in their hospitality, because there was a sea of seating available for everyone.

Prior to the building program, the church had directed a majority of its resources to global missions, staff, and ministry programs. The mission of the church was, "To know Him and Make Him Known." The call of Jesus to make disciples was central to the mission. They believed the new facility would enable them to be more effective in this endeavor. Sadly, the new facility compromised the church's ability to fulfill its mission. Rather than funneling financial

contributions into people resources, the church was forced to funnel the finances into the physical resources of the church.

I stepped into my position in August 2008, two years after the completion of the new facility, and during one of the worst downturns in the economy in recent history. When I first arrived we had five full time staff and twenty part time staff and our annual budget was \$2.1M. Just prior to my arrival at the church they were allocating close to eighty percent of their budget to personnel. One of the first things I was tasked to do when I arrived at the church in 2008 was to make major cuts in personnel and ministry budgets. Even though the church constitution stated that staff were required to resign after the senior pastor resigned, the elders chose to retain the staff and waited for the next pastor to make the difficult staffing decisions.

Moreover, the church was still carrying a massive debt load of \$7.5M with an average Sunday attendance of 650. This was a crippling burden for any sized congregation. As the new pastor I was asked to take drastic measures to cut staff and ministry budgets. Unfortunately, every staff cut had a detrimental effect on church attendance. When I had to let one pastor go, one hundred people stopped attending the church. I was also tasked to start a debt reduction campaign the first year I arrived at the church. This provided some challenges, since from the start, many people in the congregation were not in favor of constructing the building. Now, we were asking those same people to give to a debt reduction campaign, and sadly we lost people because of it.

To make matters even more challenging, the church was borrowing from the construction loan of the new building to pay staff salaries. I felt an overwhelming burden as the new pastor to get the financial house in order and somehow grow the church at the same time. We had to manage our expectations and recognize that the speed and scale of any potential growth was going to be modest until we took care of our fiduciary responsibilities. The congregation was still healing from a painful church split, carrying a significant debt load, and expecting the new pastor to rescue them from their predicament.

The elder council consisted of 12 men in their early to mid fifties, most of whom worked in the corporate world. After the founding pastor left these elders assumed the leadership of the church. Many years later I was told by the first interim pastor that the initial elder board in place after the founding pastor departure did not want to see the pastor lead the church ever again. This group felt they were called to lead the church and that the pastor should simply carry out their wishes. Though this group never explicitly shared this sentiment with me, but I felt it intuitively.

This elder council was becoming increasingly uneasy with the fallout from my transition into my role. We had lost some prominent families from the church who left without informing us as to why. Many of these families were major financial contributors and engaged in ministries around the church. Our constitution required that we have exit interviews with those who chose to leave the church. We decided to meet with, what was initially eight families, in order to find out their reasons. This group was expanded by the Elder Council to several

individuals who were unhappy with the staff, and specifically me. These individuals were interviewed by the elder council, apart from my presence, and given complete anonymity to share their frustrations. The contents of the individual interviews were shared with the entire elder council and did not paint me in a positive light.

Reading the contents of these interviews was one of the most painful things I have ever had to experience in ministry. While there were some helpful suggestions for improvement, most of the interviews were an assault on my character and incredibly hurtful. After I read the comments I felt like a complete failure and even questioned whether or not I was cut out for ministry. This was the darkest season in my ministry and I questioned whether or not I could survive in this environment.

After these interviews were made available to the elder council I met with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the elder council. They asked me what I thought of the interview feedback after reading them. I shared that, while I felt there were some helpful suggestion to improve what we were doing, I felt most of the feedback was mean spirited and unhealthy. They looked at each and told me that they agreed with the feedback and asked what I felt we should do next. I told both men that, if they were in agreement with the individuals interviewed that they needed to find another pastor. They agreed and I tendered my resignation to the Elders.

The consensus from the elders was that they needed a more charismatic leader who would attract new people to the church. The church was not growing



under my leadership at the speed and scale for which the elders had hoped. I had shared with the search committee and elders during my candidacy that we were likely not going to see any significant growth for at least three to five years. My previous experience had informed me of this, and we had a lot of unique financial and relational issues that needed to be overcome before we would be in a healthy position to support any growth. The elders were fatigued because of the conflict and crippling debt and wanted to see immediate changes. A consultant who was familiar with our situation shared with me that often churches have an unspoken expectation that the leadership turn things around within the first year and a half. This is precisely what occurred in our context.

Two assumptions were made by the elders during this brief season. First, the two elders were under the impression that they had the full support of the entire elder council. Second, the elder council was under the assumption that staff did not support me. This was untrue. In the short time I had been at the church I had developed a collaborative and cohesive team. Sadly, this cohesion and collaboration were not experienced unilaterally between the elders and pastors. When I informed the staff that I was leaving they were upset and expressed their support. I exhorted them to not make the elders enemies and cause unnecessary harm to the church leadership.

After meeting with two outside mediators and the staff the elders agreed to keep me in place. The chairman, vice chairman and another elder stepped off the council because of the decision to keep me in place. Two of the elders left the church while one elder stepped out of leadership, but stayed committed to the

church throughout my tenure. We were able to elect a new chairman and vice chairman who were trusted leaders and who also saw the error of keeping the pastors and staff separated from the decision making. We were able to rebuild an effective team of elders and pastors, who led with humility and integrity. The conflict refined us and gave us a greater appreciation for each other, and strengthened our trust in God for our future.

I agreed to stay at the church for six more years due to the support from the new council and pastoral staff. The subsequent six years were some of the richest, and most fulfilling years of my ministry. We adopted a shared leadership model rather than a bifurcated model that separated the pastors and elders. This was the model I felt I was hired to create and now I had the ability as the pastor to foster it. The church was gracious and gave the leadership a great deal of trust because of our transparency with our struggles. Most of the distrust that had been experienced in the past by the congregation toward the elders was due to poor communication.

As we reflected on those first two years it became clear what the real issue had less to do with the size of the church, how to reduce the debt, and more to do with how we could return to our original mission of making disciples? We agreed that it was not as simple as getting more people to the church through a new initiative, foolproof strategy or new hire. The new leadership team agreed that effective change was going to take time and we were all committed to investing our time and resources to see the change happen.

In spite of grinding the gears, we shifted into reverse, backed up, and started asking some foundational questions of ourselves. The pastors and elders assembled a group of 14 people from different walks of life to collaborate and develop a new definition of discipleship. We included seven women and seven men who had demonstrated strong emotional and spiritual health. The group included two participants in their sixties, three in their mid to late fifties, five in their forties, three in their thirties, and one individual in his twenties.

This focus group was asked to meet over the course of one month and generate a shared definition and methodology for discipleship. In our selection of participants, we identified people who appreciated collaboration and process. We could not afford to have people on this team who would dominate the discussion and demand immediate changes. We included people who would have a long view of spiritual formation, and not get hyper focused on monetary concerns. The group included a few staff and elders, but consisted mostly of congregants with no official title.

I elected not to attend, but instead entrusted the facilitating responsibility to a professional who helps churches and organizations like ours. The individual we chose to facilitate was also someone the pastors and elders trusted implicitly and was a respected church member.<sup>5</sup> This individual reported to the chairman of the elder council and me. I was not brought into the discussion until an initial draft

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<sup>5</sup> Greg Marshall works with CI Design in Milwaukee. Greg has helped numerous churches and companies find their corporate identity through the same process through which he led us. Greg has a unique gift to pull out the creativity of a group and manage the resulting conflicting ideas. Greg is a gifted communicator and a master with helping groups with the creation of shared metaphor. Greg was an invaluable asset to this whole process and we not have done it without him.

was constructed. I felt that my presence early in the process would potentially alter the conversation and steer the group in an already prescribed direction, rather than chart a new path for discipleship.

The facilitator and I were operating from the belief that a healthy church culture would pave the way for a compelling strategy. One of the most notable theories concerning culture directing strategy came from Edgar Schein's book, *Organizational Culture & Leadership*. In it, he writes: "The shared assumptions about 'who we are' become an important element of the organization's culture and limits the strategic options available to the organizations."<sup>6</sup> Our early attempts at formulating strategies that would ensure spiritual and numerical growth were unsatisfactory, in part, because we didn't have a culture that would sustain the strategy. We now believed that if we focused on creating a healthy culture of spiritual growth, a compelling and sustainable strategy would emerge.

This exercise was entirely new for the church, which traditionally relied on the staff or elders to formulate and implement direction. The elders had possessed all of the responsibility and authority, but had also carried the blame for systematic problems. We knew intuitively that the better way to help people embrace the new culture of discipleship was to have them participate in its creation rather than simply its adoption. The process required an elder board and pastoral staff who could lead with humility and a listening heart. It took close to four years after we restructured the elder council before we were able to construct such a team. In the end, this entire project hinged on the spiritual and

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<sup>6</sup> Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture & Leadership* (San Francisco, John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2010). 77.

emotional health of those in official leadership capacities. They had to relinquish a level of authority and responsibility and entrust it to others.

There were specific parameters for the project. First, I attempted to create a shared definition of discipleship and community life that would be defined through a collaborative process. Second, this definition needed to be simple, scalable and sustainable. That is, it needed to be understood by an educated eighth grade student, measured by the church community and have a significant shelf life. Also, it could not be overly reliant on financial resources. Thirdly, the project needed to emerge with a functional metaphor which could carry the definition.<sup>7</sup> This metaphor also needed to translate across generational lines. Fourthly, I limited my biblical research to specific images of the church already prescribed in the Bible, namely the idea of the church as family and household. This project is not an exhaustive missiological or ecclesiological study, but a focused look at what has recently been referred to as the missional movement. Lastly, the project needed to result in measurable growth in the congregation in which I served.

Our assumptions and expectations were fourfold:

- A unified definition could be created through collaboration with church leadership and the rest of the congregation.
- An increased sense of belonging would be experienced by those who participated.

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<sup>7</sup> In chapter three I will refer provide more detail as to why metaphor is so valuable for carrying ideas.

- A heightened sense of expectation for spiritual growth would emerge leading to an increased heart for the world outside of Christ.
- This shared definition would lead to metrics by which the congregation could measure its growth and transformation inside and outside the church.

My hope and prayer is that Westbrook's journey would be a resource for other churches who are grappling with how to create a culture of discipleship amidst the overwhelming expectation of automatic and effortless growth. At times, we may struggle to get the church moving in the direction of growth and change. We will all continue to row through the gears with great effort, but great satisfaction. Making disciples has and never will be easy because people are involved. However I am confident that any person or church who sets out to do the hard work of fulfilling the Great Commission in their context will find that it will be worth as much as the time they put in.

In the following chapters we will cover the following:

- Chapter 2, I will explore three distinct, but related theological components of Christianity. The first component is how we define and make disciples. The second component is ecclesiological and has to do with how we relate to each other as a family of disciples. The third is missiological focusing on to the responsibility of those who have chosen to follow Jesus.
- Chapter 3, I will explore literature from both the hard and soft sciences. I will look at some compelling secular work which offers great insight

for how to shape healthy church communities. I will also look to some literature which speaks to the necessity of language shaping culture. Finally, I will look to the work of 3DM for ecclesiological and missional insight.

- Chapter 4, I will describe the project which resulted in the creation of a shared method and metaphor for discipleship referred to as, “A No Drop Ride”.
- Chapter 5, I will assess the metrics of the “No Drop Ride” Project on the church’s ability to foster community and make disciples.

## CHAPTER II: THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Every family operates from a set of values, whether the values are ever explicitly stated or not. These values carry with them a set of expectations for how we are to relate to each other. When these expectations are met, and the values honored, family life is enjoyable. Conversely, when the expectations are missed, and the values dishonored, family life can become challenging. Most families live somewhere in between the tension of the joy and challenge. In fact, it is the tension that holds families together.

Families can and will be stretched from time to time, but their shared values, like a rubber band, will eventually pull them back together. The success of every family depends on necessary tensions that will hold them together when the world around them tries to pull them apart. This is certainly true of the family of faith, the Church! Most of the tensions we experience in the local church involve trying to live together with different and often unspoken values. If we don't have an agreed upon set of values, then we don't have the necessary tension to pull us back to our center.

A couple of years ago, we were having a discussion as Elders and Pastor and the topic of how we handle complaints came up. Our church had Connection Cards that were available for people in the service to fill out if they had questions, prayer requests, or wanted to be contacted by the church leadership. People would most often use the cards for their intended purpose, but from time to time individuals would express their frustration and anger with an aspect of the service. We encouraged the congregation to take the time to fill out a card and



express their opinions about a service with the expectation that they attach their name to it so that we could discuss their concerns in person. By establishing this explicit value, we were letting people know we cared about their opinion, but also cared deeply about the method in which they shared it.

From time to time when the congregation expressed their opinions about the church, we needed to apologize for an offense or a misstep. Often, when we had these conversations, individuals would walk away from a face to face meeting feeling more valued and connected. The issue seemed to fade away, and a deeper relationship emerged. At other times, the church leaders would meet with concerned congregants and would have to challenge their assumptions and preferences for what the church should look like. Some viewed the church as a cruise ship, where the staff are there to cater to the passenger's needs. When their needs were not being met, they felt obligated to share their disappointment with the leadership as one would share with a company's "customer service department."

The Scriptures do not display the church as a cruise ship, but as a battleship, moving deliberately and decidedly toward an objective greater than itself. The church is not a place where we gather together to have all of our needs met, though this indirectly and frequently happens. The church is, however, the collective gathering of the people of God, who encourage and exhort their fellow shipmates to fulfill their unique responsibilities in light of their mission of Jesus. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis offers a compelling purpose for the church:

The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.<sup>1</sup>

While I do not believe that Lewis' definition of the Church's purpose is the only working definition one can draw from the New Testament, it is a powerful one. Certainly, one of the primary reasons the church exists is to apprentice under Jesus and draw others into that apprenticeship.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I want to expand on the theological foundation for why the Church exists. I will explore four distinct but related components:

- The first component involves the Biblical concept of spiritual pilgrimage, and more specifically, the New Testament concept of telos.
- The second component will provide a functional definition of "disciple" and offer Biblical expectations for those who choose to follow Jesus.
- The third component will explore the ecclesiological understanding of the church as "family."
- The fourth component will be a missiological reference based on our identity as a community of disciples.

I fully realize that each of these components are worthy of an entire thesis on their own. My purpose is not to take an exhaustive look at each, but to provide a basic, and broad theological premise for the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins e-books, 2009.), 199.

<sup>2</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

## **Spiritual Pilgrimage/Telos**

In the book of Exodus, God spoke to Moses and ensured him that he saw, heard and was concerned about the treatment of the Israelites at the hands of the Egyptians. He then told Moses that he, therefore, came down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and escort them into the Promised Land.<sup>3</sup> A journey which should have taken less than two weeks turned into a 40 year trek across the Sinai Peninsula as they fought with foreign enemies, with each other and with God. It wasn't their final destination which would shape them into the people of God, but the experience of the journey itself.

Yahweh's promise was to save his people from the hands of their oppressors and invite them into a land of their own possession. This promise was an extension of the promise first given to Abram in Genesis 15. Like Moses, and the Israelites, many years earlier, Abram had embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan with the promise of land and descendants. He left the comfort of home and entered into a foreign land with faith as his fuel.

For Abram and Moses, the physical and spiritual journey would be obliquitous. Rather than the direct, straight line from point A to point B, there would be different degrees of deviation, separating the people of God from their final destination. At times, this obliquitous path was simply part of the journey God had already mapped out for His people, one that would not be easy, even though it was divinely chartered. At other times, the journey was made more difficult because of the stubbornness and disobedience of the travelers.

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<sup>3</sup> Ex 3:7-8.

In the Old the Testament, observance to the Law was the way in which avoided death and found life.<sup>4</sup> The Torah tethered the people of God to God along their spiritual journey, preventing them from wandering off the path of obedience, and thereby reaping the negative consequences. The Law was a blessing to Israel, but now Jesus is the way, the truth and the life for the church.<sup>5</sup> The Law was a foretaste of what was to come, but Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law.<sup>6</sup>

While we have not been called to conquer foreign lands, the Christian Church has been called by God to stay committed to the spiritual trek of faith. The book of Hebrews beautifully picks up on this theme in chapters eleven and twelve by highlighting the faith of the spiritual pilgrims who went before us. The author commends these early faith pioneers for their obedience, all of whom left land and limb behind in this world in order to receive a kingdom that would last.<sup>7</sup>

While we are reminded to be inspired by the faith of our forefathers, Hebrews makes it clear that we are to orient our lives toward Jesus, who is author and perfecter of our faith whose journey on earth included his becoming a servant and humbling himself on a cross that resulted in our salvation.<sup>8</sup> The Bible records for us that Jesus is the eschatological fulfillment of our faith.<sup>9</sup> Revelation records for us that all history leads to Jesus who is the Beginning and the End,

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<sup>4</sup> Deut 6:1&2.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> Matt 5:17-30; Rom 10:1-4.

<sup>7</sup> Heb 12:27&28.

<sup>8</sup> Heb 12:1&2; Phil 2:1-11.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 10:1-4; 1 Pt 1:8&9; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Cor 1:20-22; Rom 6:20-22.

perfection.<sup>10</sup> In Jesus we see the promises of God to Israel and to the whole world.<sup>11</sup>

The New Testament authors borrow and expand the Greek concept of telos. In Greek Philosophy telos can refer to the goal of man's being or the state of perfection as the purpose behind everything.<sup>12</sup> In the New Testament, as well, telos is not just the end of life's journey and state of perfection. The telic purpose as stated in the New Testament is salvation in Jesus. Peter records for us,

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result (telos) of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8&9 [NIV]).

Peter uses the present tense to describe the current benefits of the saving work of Jesus in the life of the believer.

At the same time, Peter points us to our end which we have not yet fully experienced. In verse 13 of the same pericope we are told to "set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus is revealed at his coming" (1 Peter 1:13 [NIV]). As we orient our lives toward Jesus as our telos, we experience the security of our position before God. We cling to the hope of God's grace being fully appropriated in our lives as his saved people at his second advent.

As God's saved people we presently enjoy the security of what awaits us on our spiritual journey. We also have the responsibility of becoming mature in Christ on this current stage of our journey. Part of this maturing process is God's

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<sup>10</sup> Rev 21:6.

<sup>11</sup> Rom 15:8-12.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey W. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), Vol. VIII, 49-50.

sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.<sup>13</sup> There is also the responsibility of the believer and the believing community to pursue a life of maturity in Christ. In Colossians Paul states, “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature (teleion) in Christ” (Colossians 1:28[NIV]). This maturity is experienced in the life of discipleship which I unpack in the following section.

### **Discipleship**

To understand discipleship in the New Testament we must first define three primary Greek words: (1) Follower, (2) Learner, (3) Imitator. The Greek word *akoloutheo* (“follow”) appears in the Synoptic Gospels 56 times, in John 14 times, 3 times in Acts, and once in Paul and 6 times in Revelation.<sup>14</sup> The word in itself does not necessarily have any deep theological significance, especially if it is referring to large groups.<sup>15</sup> However, the word does have special significance when used in the imperative mood and addressed to individuals.<sup>16</sup> According to the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, “*akoloutheo* is always the call to decisive and intimate discipleship of the earthly Jesus. It always points to the beginning of discipleship.”<sup>17</sup> With few exceptions the word is used in connection with the earthly Jesus and reinforces the idea of the teacher-pupil relationship.<sup>18</sup> Simply stated, a disciple is one who follows Jesus.

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor 3:18.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Brown, *New International Dict of NT Theology*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), Vol.I, 481.

<sup>15</sup> Matt 4:25, 8:1, and 21:9; Mk 10:32.

<sup>16</sup> Matt 9:9, 19:21, and 8:22; Jn 1:43, 21:19; Mk 1:16.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Brown, *New International Dict of NT Theology*, 481.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, 481.

The more common Greek word associated with disciple is *mathetes* (“disciple, learner”). In the Gospels, the Hebrew *talmid* is the equivalent of the Greek *mathetes*.<sup>19</sup> The Old Testament and LXX did not have a developed concept of teacher-pupil, but instead attested to the relationship between a master and their servant.<sup>20</sup> What we would traditionally refer to as a disciple was a person who subordinated themselves to their master. Even though the concept of teacher-pupil was not entirely developed in the Old Testament, it was attested to in the Rabbinic Literature of the day from which the New Testament borrowed. In the Jewish tradition, a *talmid* was an individual who was devoted to the whole of the Torah. These individuals (*talmidim*) were devoted and dependent on a Rabbi who served as a mediator between them and the Torah. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology provides additional insight:

...learning is determined by the authority of the teacher and his interpretation of the Torah—not by a personal and, as far as possible, unbiased study of the Torah. Therefore learning means primarily that the Talmud appropriates the knowledge of his teacher and examines it critically by comparing it against the Torah.<sup>21</sup>

The *talmid* is a person who is under the authority of their master and one who seeks to emulate their teaching.<sup>22</sup>

*Mathetes* occurs 264 times in the New Testament and is exclusively found in the Gospels and Acts, and is used to indicate “total attachment to someone in

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<sup>19</sup> Brad Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Baker Publishing Co, 2007), 30.

<sup>20</sup> For example Joshua is referred to as the servant or aide of Moses (Exod. 24:13; Num. 11:28), Elisha the servant of Elijah (1 Ki. 19:21), and Gehazi of Elisha (2 Ki. 4:12).

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 485.

<sup>22</sup> Lk 6:40.

discipleship.”<sup>23</sup> Disciples were learners who submitted themselves to the teaching and authority of their rabbi. The learning relationship between the teacher and pupil requires a lasting commitment, and unconditional sacrifice.<sup>24</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus lays out the level of sacrifice his disciples must commit to in order to follow him.

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it (Matt 10:37-39 [NIV]).

Luke’s Gospel puts it even more succinctly by stating that a disciple must be willing to “hate” even his father, mother, brothers and sisters in order to follow him<sup>25</sup>. Jesus is using a Hebrew idiom which emphasizes a point of comparison. “Disciples are to be so committed to learning from their master that love of parents is like hatred.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus is stating that family relationships need to take a secondary role to the relationship between a teacher and his pupil. If a disciple is to follow a Rabbi they will be required to surrender their family, and even their life itself!

While Jesus’ words may seem strange for the modern audience, they would have been commonly understood in first century rabbinic literature. Disciples were commonly referred to as *banim* “sons” or “children” of their rabbis.<sup>27</sup> It was a commonly held belief that a father brought a child into the

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, 486.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, 485.

<sup>25</sup> Lk 14:25.

<sup>26</sup> Brad Young, *Meet the Rabbis*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Young, 31.



world, but a spiritual father (rabbi) would be able to help a spiritual son be birthed into the next world. Moreover, becoming a disciple of a respected rabbi would be a high honor for a family and an entire community. As a result, families and communities would have rallied behind an individual in order for them to realize this aspiration.<sup>28</sup>

According to Young, there are similarities to the way rabbis of the day mentored their disciples and how Jesus mentored his group:<sup>29</sup>

- First, every rabbi summoned a select group to follow him. In Matthew 4:19&20 Jesus summoned his disciples by saying, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him (Mt 4:19-20[NIV]).
- Second, he demanded that his disciples not just hear his teachings, but actually do them.<sup>30</sup> For one to do this in an oral society they would need to hear and memorize the teachings of Jesus in order to live them out.
- Third, Jesus’ disciples would learn through observation. They would observe his life and death and be called to make similar sacrifices in order to follow him.<sup>31</sup>
- Fourth, Jesus’ disciples learned by working alongside him in an apprenticing relationship. Mark’s Gospel points out that he appointed the disciples so that, “they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mk 3:14&15 [NIV]).
- Fifth, Jesus sent his disciples on assignments where they worked apart from him and would report back what they had done.<sup>32</sup>
- Sixth, Jesus called his disciples into a level of accountability, evaluating their work and encouraging them to pursue a more meaningful spiritual life by seeking the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>33</sup>

There also appear to be unique differences between the rabbis of the day and Jesus in terms of the teacher-pupil relationship. When Jesus called his

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<sup>28</sup> Young, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Young, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Lk 7:47.

<sup>31</sup> Matt 16:24-28; Mk 8:34-9:1; Lk 9:23-27.

<sup>32</sup> Matt 10:5-25; Lk 10:1-20.

<sup>33</sup> Matt 6:33.

disciples it was a calling from which they could not easily depart. Instead, following Jesus meant one must “sacrifice the whole of his life for the whole of life.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus informed his disciples that following him will also involve persecution and suffering.<sup>35</sup> As his disciples they were also agreeing to share in his ministry responsibilities of healing and baptizing other potential disciples.<sup>36</sup> Unique to Jesus’ call was the call to serve in the Kingdom of God which was and is both here and now, but also not yet.<sup>37</sup>

Also unique to Jesus’ call is that he called ordinary people from different professions whereas most other rabbis of the day would have worked with highly gifted individuals.<sup>38</sup> Some of those whom he called, namely Matthew the tax collector, would have even been considered unclean by most rabbis of the day.<sup>39</sup> In the common Jewish setting, pupils would one day become rabbis themselves; instead Jesus told his disciples that they would never become rabbis and that he would always be their teacher.<sup>40</sup>

The most distinctive aspect of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples is that he was and is not just rabbi, but Lord! This relationship became especially clear after his resurrection from the grave. Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Jesus and touching his resurrected body exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28, [NIV]). The book of Acts is the account of how these ordinary men and women

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<sup>34</sup> Brown, 488.

<sup>35</sup> Jn 17:20&21.

<sup>36</sup> Matt 10:1-42.

<sup>37</sup> Mk 1:15.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 4:13.

<sup>39</sup> Mk 2:14.

<sup>40</sup> Matt 23:8.

became witnesses of their Risen Lord, Jesus. In fact, "The essence of discipleship lies in the disciple's fulfillment of his duty to be a witness to his Lord in his entire life (Witness)".<sup>41</sup>

Over time, the word *mathetai* ("disciples") became a description for the gathered community.<sup>42</sup> In the more general sense, the word became synonymous with Christians. Disciples are those who hold to his teaching, love one another, and who bear fruit.<sup>43</sup> In the Gospel of John we read that disciples are those who live according to the truth, and who have been called out of darkness and into the light.<sup>44</sup>

The third word commonly associated with discipleship is the Greek word *mimēomai* ("imitate"). This word and all of its correlated words "are used with an ethical-imperative aim and are linked with obligation to a specific kind of conduct."<sup>45</sup> Every occurrence of the words exist outside of the Gospels, residing primarily in the Pauline section of the New Testament as well as Hebrews. The Apostle Paul uses the word to point the believers in Corinth, Philippi and Thessaloniki to his conduct and way of life in order to emulate them.<sup>46</sup> While he is not calling these believers to personal obedience, or setting himself up as the perfect example to follow, he is encouraging these believers to imitate the same kind of single-minded focus he possessed in reaching the goal of faith in Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, 490.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, 490.

<sup>43</sup> Jn 8:31, 13:35, 15:8.

<sup>44</sup> Jn 3:21.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, 491.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Cor 4:16, 11:1; Phil 3:17; 2 Thess 3:7,9.

<sup>47</sup> Phil 3:13&14.

Paul admits his own imperfection in not completely measuring up to the example of Jesus, but also reminds the Corinthians that he is their spiritual father through the Gospel.<sup>48</sup> In every family children naturally imitate their fathers. This is arguably even more true in the spiritual family of faith. The Corinthians are the spiritual progeny of the Apostle, so he has, by definition, a level of authority in their lives.

The word *mimēomai* is used more inclusively of faith leaders who communicated the Word of God to the early Christian communities. The author of Hebrews records, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7 [NIV]). In this verse, imitating the faith of the Christian leaders does not mean striving to live up to their faith, but rather, “a willingness to take the same way of faith.”<sup>49</sup> It is implied in these usages is that the target of imitation is ultimately Jesus and not men. Anyone who enters into a life of faith in Jesus must imitate him!

When we imitate Jesus, we live out the model he set for us. Therefore, imitation should naturally lead to multiplication. As followers, learners, and imitators, the natural course of our lives will lead us to invite others into a relationships with Jesus. In the final chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19&20a[NIV]). The Great

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<sup>48</sup> 1 Cor 4:14-16.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey W. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), Vol.IV, 666.

Commission is naturally extended to every believer of every age and isn't the responsibility of the paid professionals, but every disciple. Disciples make disciples.<sup>50</sup>

## **Ecclesiology**

The second component I will explore is the ecclesiological understanding of the church. The church is, at its core, the gathering of disciples who hold to the teaching of Jesus, love one another and who bear fruit with their lives. This describes for us the who and what of discipleship, which is foundational. But the Bible is also replete with metaphors for how we are to relate to each other as disciples. The specific metaphor I will explore for the church is *oikos*.

*Oikos* literally referred to both the structure of the physical building, but was also used metaphorically to describe the inhabitants and all their property.<sup>51</sup> This would include men and women of different generations, unmarried daughters, male and female slaves, sojourners, and workers. Simply stated, an *oikos* represented more than a nuclear family, but included a level of diverse persons who collectively made up a family. This is a fitting description of the church!

This metaphor is seen throughout the New Testament. The author of Hebrews describes the church as God's house.<sup>52</sup> In Galatians, Paul directs the believers on how they are to relate to each other as the family of believers.<sup>53</sup> In 1

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<sup>50</sup> We will explore this later in the section on missiology.

<sup>51</sup> Brown, 248.

<sup>52</sup> Heb 3:6.

<sup>53</sup> Gal 6:10.

Timothy 5 the Apostle gives the church in Ephesus clear instructions in how we are to treat others in the church as members of a family, especially those who are older in the church.<sup>54</sup> The Apostle Paul repeatedly refers to Timothy as his dear and true son and to the churches he pastors as his dear children.<sup>55</sup>

The book of Ephesians reveals to us our corporate identity as the church, providing one of the most succinct theological foundations for the church as *oikos* (family). In the Greek, verses 3-14 of chapter 2 are one long sentence or doxology, describing the past, present and future salvific work of Christ. In verse five Paul states, “In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...” (Eph 2:3-14 [NIV]). Paul uses familial language as he describes our inclusion into God’s family through Jesus. As Gentiles, we are now included into God’s family and identified as sons (and daughters). This language is especially important as we understand our former relationship to God and our new standing before our Heavenly Father as his adoptive children. Because God is our father, we have new access to him through his son Jesus, our debts have been forgiven, we have been given a new name, a new inheritance, and have been granted a new family of brothers and sisters.

In chapter 2, Paul paints for us an even more elaborate picture of our identity as God’s household.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,  
20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ

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<sup>54</sup> 1 Tim 5:1-3.

<sup>55</sup> 1 Tim 5:1-3.

Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22 [NIV]).

In Ephesians 5:19-22, Paul expands from describing the church as a family to describing the church as a building and temple.<sup>56</sup> While this shift seems abrupt and unrelated, the words are in fact etymologically connected in the Greek text. Paul is using a play on the word *oikos*. In the same pericope Paul mentions that gentiles are no longer “aliens” (*paroikoi*), but “members of the household” (*oikeioi*), “built” (*epoikodomethentes*) on a sure foundation, and the “building” (*oikodome*) is “built together” (*synoikodomeisthe*) (“built together”).<sup>57</sup>

In Ephesians 2:5-6 Paul uses the preposition *syn* (with) to make the connection between Jesus and believers. In Ephesians 2:19-22 he uses three more prepositions to describe our connection to other believers: (1) “fellow citizens” (*sympolitai*), “joined together” (*synarmologeo*), and “built together” (*synoikodomeo*).<sup>58</sup> Paul’s focus here is to provide additional theological content for how we have been joined together with Christ and subsequently, to each other. In doing so, he reinforces how intimately we are bound to Jesus and to each other as the family of faith. In fact, it would be very difficult to read Ephesians and walk away with the false notion that we can be connected to Jesus and somehow separated from other believers. This challenges the false

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<sup>56</sup> 1 Cor 3:16&17; 6:19.

<sup>57</sup> Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Abridged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 761.

<sup>58</sup> Barker and Kohlenberger, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 762.

notion of having a relationship with Jesus apart from having a relationship with fellow believers.

In Ephesians 2:22, Paul concludes the larger section of chapter 2 by proclaiming that we, the church, are being built together with other believers (Jews and Gentiles) to become the very dwelling of God. God's people have become God's temple through the saving work of Jesus. Moreover, the very people (Gentiles) who were at one time kept out of the temple to worship have now become the temple in which God dwells.<sup>59</sup> That is, the privileges that were once only afforded to Israel are now afforded to Gentiles in Jesus. In this new standing both Jews and Gentiles have been joined together in Christ and are no longer outsiders, but have full rights as sons and daughters.

In 1 Timothy 3 Paul extends the idea of the church as the household/family of God (*oiko theou*). Again, the phrase is not to be translated as a physical place of worship, but the people. In verses one through twelve, Paul gives Timothy specific instructions for how leaders are to conduct themselves in their own families. Overseers and deacons must measuring up to the conduct in order to be qualified as leaders in the family of God. In verses 14-16, Paul offers reasons for why the way we conduct ourselves is so vital.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15&16 [NIV]).

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<sup>59</sup> Barker and Kohlenberger, 762.



While God's truth stands upon itself, the church is revealed as the pillar and foundation of that truth. Syntactically, the two words are in apposition to the word church. The idea is that the church is the pillar, and as such, the prop or support of the truth. As the household of God (Family of God), it is not just our orthodoxy (what we believe) that matters, but our orthopraxy (how we live). The motivation for our good conduct is based on the deep mystery recorded in the creed Paul records in verse sixteen.

In chapter one Paul starts his letter off to Timothy with instructions on how to deal with those who are not upholding truth.<sup>60</sup> Specifically, Paul instructs the younger pastor to command them to stop teaching false doctrines. Paul mentions the two names Hymenaeus and Alexander as people who have rejected the faith. In his second letter to Timothy he mentions Hymenaeus again, but includes Philetus, citing that they were teaching false doctrine concerning the resurrection of believers.<sup>61</sup> Here Paul is emphasizing the solid foundation of truth, and declaring that in spite of the false teaching, God's stereos (solid) foundation hesteken (stands firm). There is some debate as to the source of the foundation of the truth from this passage. In Galatians 2:9 James, Peter, and John are referred to as pillars of the faith. However, as we saw in Ephesians, this description seems to have been expanded from the Apostles to the entire church. Also, Paul's previous reference of 1 Timothy 3:15 would align with the foundation of the truth being the church.

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<sup>60</sup> 1Tim 1:3-7.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Tim 2:18b.

The section that follows the solid foundation reference states that, “The Lord knows those who are his,’ and ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (2 Tim 2:19 [NIV]). Paul seems to make a direct correlation between the solid foundation (the church) and those who are his, those who confess the name of the Lord and who turn away from wickedness. There are two components Paul connects to those who are the Lord’s, those who confess the Lord and those who turn away from wickedness. In these two components, Paul points to the connection of the believer to Jesus in both creed (confession) and conduct (turning away), both of which will guard the Church from the gangrenous heretical teaching of the men like Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus. It is God’s oikos (family), the church, who are the Lord’s instrument in the world, upholding and protecting the truth from heresy and ensuring its continuance in the world.<sup>62</sup>

### **Missiology**

The third component I wish to discuss is the missiological purpose of the church. Our Western mindset leans toward a more individualized way thinking concerning conversion. This has, at times, led the church to separate people from their natural oikos after they enter the faith, and in doing so, cut people off from their natural, God-given mission field. In his book, *The World Is Smaller Than You Think*, author and pastor Tom Mercer states,

Our individualistic Western thinking led us to a style of evangelism termed ‘extractionist.’ That is, it disregarded the inquirer’s oikos and

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), Vol.II, 411.

even viewed it as a barrier rather than a gift from God! So, we ripped a new believer from their oikos, often doing so even before the person had come to faith in Jesus or certainly before they had the opportunity to come to any degree of maturity. Then we wondered why they were unable to reach their oikos with the Good News.<sup>63</sup>

The author is revealing a weakness in the predominant outreach model for many North American Evangelical churches. An individual will naturally have more opportunities to share Jesus with those whom they are in closest proximity. Their immediate oikos should consist of the people who will see the greatest transformation in the individual. Arguably, the most effective form of evangelism would be to disciple individual's, reorienting them to reach out to their oikos rather than replace one family with another family.

In order to do this we have to learn to shift our mindset from the individual to the larger community surrounding them. In other words, we must learn to think in systems if our mission of reaching the world for Jesus is to be effective. In his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, author and civic leader Peter Block warns leaders of the pitfalls of expecting systemic change solely from individual transformation. He states,

We know a good deal about individual transformation, but our understanding about the transformation of human systems, such as our workplaces, neighborhoods, and towns, is primitive at best, and too often naive in the belief that if enough individuals awaken, and become intentional and compassionate beings, the shift in community will follow.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Tom Mercer, *8 to 15, The World Is Smaller Than You Think* (Oikos Books, Kindle Edition, 2009), 712-716.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Kindle Edition, 2008), 4.

Block goes to say that, “If we continue to invest in individuals as the primary target of change, we will spend our primary energy on this and never fully invest in communities. In this way, individual transformation comes at the cost of community.”<sup>65</sup>

While Block’s context is in the secular, civic arena, the church should recognize this reality. In the North American Evangelical Church we tend to place an over-emphasis on the individual apart from their oikos. We invite individuals into the community and offer them a new subculture in which to belong. This new subculture carries with it new values, mores, norms, and new demands which makes it difficult for new believers to maintain their relationships outside the church. Often, we disciple these new believers and keep them from their mission field until we feel they are ready to return to their old relationships without being drawn into their old way of life. In doing so we might be stripping new believers from their previous community when, perhaps, they might have the greatest impact reaching their unreached friends.<sup>66</sup>

In the New Testament there are examples which illustrate this principle. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas answer the jailer’s question of what he must do in order to be saved. Paul answers the question and then offers salvation to the jailer and his entire household. It is safe to infer that Paul is offering salvation to everyone in the jailer’s household on the same terms as he is offering to the jailer, namely, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> I am speaking primarily of North American realities and recognize this may be different for some individuals from other parts of the world who would be excommunicated from their families and communities because of their conversion to Christianity.

household” (Acts 16:32[NIV]). We cannot infer that the jailer’s acceptance of Jesus will save his whole family, but that his faith will inspire them to belief in Jesus. In the Pater-Familia culture a father had a level of influence over the rest of the household which included immediate and extended family as well as servants and other dependents.

The passage in Acts does not tell us whether the jailer was the head of the household or just a member of it. Also, it is not entirely clear how the jailer’s household came to faith, but from the immediate context it appears that they all came to faith shortly after the jailer’s conversion and prior to their own baptisms. We don’t know what happened to this household, but we can imagine the potential impact of each member after they came to faith. In his book, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, Mike Breen highlights the potential impact of a household that comes to faith:

A spiritual family has developed and is now a household of leaders. And soon, these missional leaders will create households of their own as they are sent out to be leaders in their own right. This is why we don’t run a church like we run a business. Ultimately, when the leadership pipeline is working correctly, we should be running a church like we run a family.<sup>67</sup>

Breen is noting the potential for exponential growth if the church will see each member of the household as a potential leader of their own household. The benefit of this missional strategy will naturally shift the responsibility for evangelism and outreach to the individual rather than to the church leadership. Sadly, this stands in contradiction to the program-based model that many churches have adopted for their missiological strategy.

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<sup>67</sup> Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (3DM, Kindle Edition, 2012), 1745-1749.

Rather than assuming the sole responsibility for reaching the world for Jesus, churches need to facilitate relationships with other believers who will then fulfill the Great Commission in their own oikos. Pastor Tom Mercer articulates this beautifully by stating, “A great church finds ways to facilitate the Great Commission in the lives of believers who, quite frankly, don’t feel that great at it.”<sup>68</sup> The church is therefore at its best when it is equipping believers to understand their unique co-mission with God to live out Matthew 28.

The local church should recognize her unique role in preparing people to be on mission with God in their world. The English word that we use for this is “commission”, but it is derived from the Greek; the word is oikonomia. Some English translations translate this word as “administration” or “stewardship.” Oikonomia is a compound of two Greek words for “household” and “law”. The word is used in the literal sense to describe an “administrator” or “steward” who has been placed in a position of responsibility over a household. In the literal sense, “God has given each of us official (evidently, even legal) influence among that specific and relatively small circle of people.”<sup>69</sup> In the larger understanding, we are to responsibly steward the relationships which God has provided for us within our oikos.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1 the Apostle Paul used oikonomia metaphorically to describe his role as an apostle to “steward” the mysteries of God. The mystery to which Paul refers is the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, a message which was at one time kept hidden, but has now been revealed. Paul himself was

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<sup>68</sup> Mercer, *8 to 15, The World Is Smaller Than You Think*, 1809-1811.

<sup>69</sup> Mercer, *8 to 15*, 1796-1803.

“commissioned” to share this mystery, the Gospel, through his preaching.<sup>70</sup> He states in Colossians, “I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people” (Col 1:25&26 [NIV]).

Since the Word of God has been revealed to us (the Lord’s people), we too have been commissioned with the same message.<sup>71</sup> The Apostle Peter uses the word to describe the responsibility (“stewardship”) of every believer to use the gift (grace) of God given to them.<sup>72</sup> In 2 Corinthians the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that as a result of their conversion, they too, just as the Apostles, have become “new creations” and been reconciled to God.<sup>73</sup> While the word *themenos* is used here in place of *oikonomia* the same concept applies; every believer has been “committed” with the message of reconciliation as a result of first being reconciled to God through Christ.<sup>74</sup>

When we entered into a relationship with Jesus as a disciple, we were commissioned by Him, or more directly put, placed on a co-mission with Him. Every believer now has the unique, God-ordained responsibility of stewarding the message and spiritual gifts he has given us in order to influence our *oikos* and the larger world for Jesus. God has already provided us with our own mission field by supernaturally and strategically placing the people he has in our *oikos*.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 1 Cor 9:17; Col 1:25; Eph 3:2.

<sup>71</sup> Matt 28:19&20.

<sup>72</sup> 1 Pt 4:10.

<sup>73</sup> 2 Cor 5:17-19.

<sup>74</sup> Barker and Kohlenberger, 354.

<sup>75</sup> Mercer, 249-252.

The simplicity of this is sometimes lost in 21st Century missiology and has been replaced with complicated and sometimes, artificial strategies which have not proven to be entirely successful.<sup>76</sup> Tom Mercer highlights the beauty and simplicity already afforded us in the oikos strategy,

Another way to describe oikos is that it is organic. It is totally authentic— there is nothing artificial about it. It's not imported from someone or somewhere else. In fact, it's already at work wherever you attend church, in your home and in your individual life. It fits all ages and levels of maturity. It flows naturally out of a Christian lifestyle.<sup>77</sup>

This is to say, that, every church already has its own natural strategy, but many churches still choose to adopt the missiological strategies of other churches. This can actually lead to a decrease in their own effectiveness in meeting the spiritual needs of those around them.

Historically speaking, the oikos strategy has worked well. In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark writes about the exponential growth of the early church in the first three centuries as they met in homes. He states, Beginning in AD 40 with around 1,000 believers (around 0.0017% of the population of the Roman Empire), Stark shows how by AD 350 the total size of the church had multiplied to roughly 33,882,000 (56.5% of the Empire).<sup>78</sup> A chief component to early Christianity's strategy was what we now refer to as "missional communities," or what we have referring to as oikos.

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<sup>76</sup> In this section I am referring generally to Western developed countries which are embedded in post-modernity, but specifically the U.S..

<sup>77</sup> Mercer, 296-308.

<sup>78</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Harper Collins, 1997), 10.



We must be careful even when looking to the history of the church that we do not universalize a particular and suggest that any strategy is “The Strategy” for missions. For example, many have suggested that we return to the model highlighted in Acts 2:42-47 as the universal model to follow for all ages. While there is much we can learn from the early church, we must recognize the unique challenges in the 21st Century and seek to meet those challenges uniquely. Moreover, we will risk running into hermeneutical hurdles if we read the descriptive words of Acts as a prescription for every church of every age. The scale of conversion that resulted in the early believers meetings seems to have been an outlier and not normative for church growth throughout church history.

However, the modern church should learn from and follow the early church’s focus on relationships, sharing meals together, study of the Bible, authentic worship, attentiveness to the Spirit’s leading, and deep care for those in need. These foci must be included in the church’s continual mission in the world no matter what the age, but especially in the Post-Modern Age.<sup>79</sup>

In the book *Growing Young*, the authors provide critical insight into the shifting needs of the Millennial generation. One of the significant points they make about this generation is that, “Warm is the new cool”.<sup>80</sup> They reference how many people in this generation don’t expect churches to match their generational preferences, but instead are interested in authenticity and connection. They go

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<sup>79</sup> Mike Breen & Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities* (Zondervan Publishing House. Kindle Edition, 2010), 1001.

<sup>80</sup> Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition, 2016), 2731-2733.

on to say that this generation is not interested in having church leaders do church for them, but rather with them. They give the following charge to church leaders, "Regardless of whether you meet in an auditorium or a house, consider how your worship service can feel more like a family room."<sup>81</sup>

For many years, the people outside the church have recognized the importance of creating space for people to connect on a deeper level. In a 2006 interview with CBS 60 Minutes, Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks proclaimed, "We're in the business of human connection and humanity, creating communities in a third place between work and home."<sup>82</sup> In the interview, Schultz goes on to boast about one of the mantras coined by an employee at Starbucks, "We're not in the business of filling bellies. We're in the business of filling souls."<sup>83</sup> Starbucks understands that environments are about more than physical space. Coffee houses like Starbucks have become the "third place" in between home and work, where people go to connect with other human beings and have their "souls filled." This reveals a universal need and desire to connect with others.

We live in an increasingly connected, yet impersonal world. Because of technology, we are more connected to people than we have ever been in human history, yet we are less deeply connected to these same people. Many people are longing for something deeper and finding it in other places. Mike Green states, "When people encounter the church, they should encounter the soft tissue

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<sup>81</sup> Powell, Mulder, Griffin, *Growing Young*, 2731-2733.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/04/21/60minutes/main1532246.shtml>.

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/04/21/60minutes/main1532246.shtml>.

of community. What is this soft tissue? Real people doing life together. A sense of belonging. A family.”<sup>84</sup>

We must find ways to draw people to Jesus through our personal transformation as disciples, and not solely through our church programs. We must relearn what it means to function as a family. I believe in order to do this we must get back to the basics of our faith and stop viewing the church as a business where consumers come to get their fill week after week. We must be stretched again in order to be drawn back to our center, Jesus. In chapter 4 I will explore this more fully.

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<sup>84</sup> Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (Zondervan Publishing House. Kindle Edition, 2012), 2300-2303.

### CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

I first came across Block's work as a recommendation from a ministry colleague prior to starting this project. As I began delving deeper into the project I was reminded of the insight Block provides, specifically in creating a collaborative environment for community transformation. His work is also unique in that it recognizes the importance of the inherent limitations connected with the western mindset which focuses on the individual over the community.

I chose McGilchrist, Haidt and Lakhoff's work in an effort to draw from different arenas of expertise, specifically the area of moral psychology. Their work came at the recommendation of my friend and colleague, Greg Marshall. Greg has a strong working knowledge of the resources in this field because of his professional responsibilities as a branding expert. These resources were especially helpful in understanding resources on how the brain works and how to remove barriers for change to occur. After reading these sources I felt all three books were accessible for me as a researcher and layman and likewise would be accessible for the reader.

I was first introduced to Carlson and Lueken's book through a pastor friend after sharing about the challenges we were experiencing during the first couple years at Westbrook Church. As the thesis was still in its conceptual form I found myself returning to this book. The book reflected the sentiment with which we were struggling as a church to define our purpose. I shared the book with The Westbrook Elders and Pastors who read it and found it helped define our

challenge. The book provided a helpful base from which to challenge our previously held assumptions for how we were doing church.

Breen, Hunter and Mercer's work provided a theological and ecclesiological foundation from which to build a preferred church culture. Breen's work allowed us to look at alternative models to the "attractional" model which Westbrook had adopted by many in the church leadership prior to my arrival as the senior pastor. Also, Breen, and the organization he works with, 3DM, have had great success employing their missional model in Post-Christian Europe. In addition to the contemporary significance, Breen's work also drew from the rich historical experience of the Christian Church. I came across Hunter and Mercer's work through my interaction with Breen's work. Both Hunter and Mercer provide a rich historical expansion of Breen's work. Hunter's work was invaluable for providing historical context for the Celtic Church, and namely the concept of "belonging before believing." Mercer's work was chosen because of his critical scholarship into the New Testament concept of the church as household or family.

### **Peter Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging**

Peter Block is an author and consultant who specializes in empowerment, stewardship, chosen accountability, and the reconciliation of communities. The ideas in this book helped our church shape our shared metaphor and methodology for discipleship. Although the audience for this book is primarily secular, we found there were areas of overlap in the church world, specifically as we explored the concept of oikos. Block states, "First and foremost, to belong is

to be related to and a part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to note that when we belong to a community we act as creators and co-owners of that community.<sup>2</sup> This is how communities should exist, especially the community of faith, the church.

Block states that most of our communities consist of silos which operate near each other but rarely touch or overlap.<sup>3</sup> While he is speaking of communities in the larger collective sense of the institutions that make up cities and neighborhoods, this is also true of smaller communities such as the church. In the church and in communities on the whole we have been “more interested in individuality and independence than in interdependence.”<sup>4</sup> The consequence of this way of thinking is the fragmentation of communities, which, in turn, affects individuals. Block states, “If we continue to invest in individuals as the primary target of change, we will spend our primary energy on this and never fully invest in communities. In this way, individual transformation comes at the cost of community.”<sup>5</sup>

Block’s solution to this fragmentation is to focus on the quality of relationships among the people who comprise a community, a term he borrows from Robert Putnam referred to as social capital. This increased social capital

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Kindle Edition, 2008), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Block, *Community*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Block, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Block, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Block, 5.

becomes a conduit by which communities are strengthened and transformed. He states,

The key to creating or transforming community, then, is to see the power in the small but important elements of being with others...For at the most operational and practical level, after all the thinking about policy, strategy, mission, and milestones, it gets down to this: How are we going to be when we gather together.<sup>6</sup>

This question is a foundational question that any group should ask itself as it seeks to be a transformative force in individuals and in communities. Many organizations and institutions, including the church, focus on the operational and missional questions which focus on what we should be doing rather than who we should be. Block places these questions in an order which seems to be more foundational for building strong communities.

Block acknowledges that his thinking has been greatly influenced by John L. McKnight, Co-Director of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute and Professor Emeritus of Communications Studies and Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. Block explores Professor McKnight's Asset-Based Community Development as a starting point for how communities are transformed. Block summarizes McKnight's strategy by stating that, "...if we want to make communities stronger, we should study their assets, resources, and talents. It is in the attention to these things that something new can occur."<sup>7</sup> Block goes on to share that, "Communities are built from the assets and gifts of their citizens, not from the citizens' needs or deficiencies."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Block, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Block, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Block, 14.

McKnight's, and by extension, Block's philosophy places the responsibility back on the community itself rather than solely on the leaders of the community. This philosophy is focused more on community-oriented transformation than leader-oriented transformation. Block states,

Whatever the symptom— drugs, deteriorating houses, poor economy, displacement, violence— it is when citizens stop waiting for professionals or elected leadership to do something, and decide they can reclaim what they have delegated to others, that things really happen.<sup>9</sup>

Block believes that whatever the issue facing the community, the people who live in that community have the collective wisdom to meet the demands and solve the issue.<sup>10</sup>

Block discusses the necessity of adopting a common language through establishing relationships. This, in turn, will lead to the reshaping and transforming of communities. He asserts that before any potential problems can be addressed a sense of relatedness must be established by those who will shape the future. This is a very different strategy than the problem-solving strategy, which focuses solely on removing the problem, often without relational connection among those tasked with shaping change. In Block's model, problem-solving becomes the secondary issue and relationship and community building among those responsible for shaping the future become the primary issues.<sup>11</sup>

Block offers helpful insight into the role of leaders in creating and transforming community. First, he states that, "...perhaps the real task of

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<sup>9</sup> Block, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Block, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Block, 80.



leadership is to confront people with their freedom. This may be the ultimate act of love that is called for from those who hold power over others.”<sup>12</sup> He states that freedom creates a sense of accountability rather than removes it.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to state that every time a community gathers they must be challenged to become an owner rather than a consumer, and this is the role of the leader.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, in order to do this, a leader must be intentional about “creating the structures and experiences that bring citizens together to identify and solve their own issues.”<sup>15</sup> Every time a community gathers it must, “be an example of the future it wants to create.”<sup>16</sup>

Block challenges the conventional methodologies for transforming communities. This view states that, “better or more leadership, programs, funding, expertise, studies, training, and master plans are the way to build community.”<sup>17</sup> He argues that, while these things may improve communities, they do not ultimately transform them. The conventional methodologies focus on speed and scale while Block’s methodology focuses on depth and relatedness.<sup>18</sup>

This book provided valuable information for my thesis by helping me recognize the existing talent in our church community as the key to creating a sense of belonging and to the transforming of our community. Block’s work helped our church see that our greatest resource was our people and they would

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<sup>12</sup> Block, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Block, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Block, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Block, 74.

<sup>16</sup> Block, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Block, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Block, 73.

be the key to helping us address the task of how to make disciples. This provided a necessary corrective of focusing on people over task. In the end, the task was accomplished through the people. The leaders of the church were able to provide a relational and organic environment which allowed the congregants (co-owners) to shape a strategy for the community which led to transformation. As the key both to creating a sense of belonging and to the transforming of our community the book also helped us recognize who we were already rather than attempting to create a picture of who we wanted to become.

Many of Block's assumptions of human nature are grounded in secular humanism, which holds to the view that human beings are basically good. This theory fails to account for the inherent sinful nature in human beings, which creates significant challenges for belonging and transformation. However, his book also challenges many secular business theories which places most of the burden of transformation on leaders and their strategies. Block provides fundamental questions for who we are going to be when we gather. This foundational reframing allowed us to focus on the quality of our relationships and environments and became a helpful corrective for our church, which had historically focused on our problems and found our rescue in programs.

Ian McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*

Iain McGilchrist is a former Consultant Psychiatrist and Clinical Director at the Bethlem Royal & Maudsley Hospital, London, and researcher in neuroimaging at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. McGilchrist has also taught English at Oxford University, and written numerous books on the brain

hemispheres, most notably, *The Master and His Emissary*. This work is a smaller essay which borrows from some of his previous work. In this essay he writes how the brain works, specifically how the right and left brain work in tandem to allow us to interpret and understand the world around us. His research challenges the previously held notion that the brain hemispheres are sharply divided between reason and emotion and reveals that the brain is far more complex.

McGilchrist's work was helpful for understanding how the brain works. He turns exclusively to science as being the tool which will ultimately rescue us from our current predicament of the increasing body of information we have about ourselves. While I do not agree with his conclusions, his essay was helpful for understanding how the brain interprets metaphor as a way of helping us understand the world around us. His work provided a necessary caution for human beings to be suspicious of their own way of thinking. The thesis of his work is stated as,

My aim will be to illuminate not so much what we are, which no brain can tell us, but what we, and the world we create, are not – which it can. It gives us tangible evidence of what might shape our thinking. Looking at the brain may, funnily enough, even help us get a clearer view of the folly of trying to reduce mind to matter. It may show us that only half our brains would think that way.<sup>19</sup>

The author's thesis cautions us to not reduce our thinking to one side of the brain as a purely physical entity, but something far more complex.

McGilchrist's research leads the reader to consider a more integrated understanding of the brain through both hemispheres. His assertion is that our

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<sup>19</sup> Ian McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search For Meaning: Why Are We So Unhappy?* (Yale University Press, 2012 ), 55-58.

brains have the ability to prioritize and prevent us from embracing new, potentially disruptive information because of its hard wiring.

McGilchrist notes that one of the significant differences between the two hemispheres is that the left side tends to operate out of fixed states whereas the right side tends to operate from a fluid state.<sup>20</sup> He states that, "...the purpose of the left hemisphere is to allow us to manipulate the world, not to understand it."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the left side of the brain is "blind to what it doesn't think is there."<sup>22</sup>

Traditional thinking has led us to believe that the left hemisphere is the side of the brain that can be trusted whereas the right side is the side with which we must be suspicious. McGilchrist's findings show that the left hemisphere is only in touch with its representation of reality and that we can run into danger of following either hemisphere exclusively. "An uncritical following of intuition can lead us astray, but so can an uncritical following of logic."<sup>23</sup>

This research is especially helpful for those of us in the West who have placed a strong emphasis, and sometimes blind trust, on left brain's thinking. McGilchrist notes that we may have chosen to rely more on left brain thinking because it has proven to be more "successful." But, he questions what we have understood as "success." He concedes that, "It is, I repeat, a culture that is very good at using the world, as if it were just a heap of resource to further our plans" but he questions whether or not these plans are always wise.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ian McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search For Meaning*, 192-194.

<sup>21</sup> McGilchrist, 208.

<sup>22</sup> McGilchrist, 128-129.

<sup>23</sup> McGilchrist, 330-333.

<sup>24</sup> McGilchrist, 430-433.

McGilchrist notes the limitations of left brain thinking which “does not understand the power of metaphor, through which alone meaning would come about. It is not in touch.”<sup>25</sup> Even though the right hemisphere has been referred to as the “minor hemisphere,” it is in fact the part of the brain that understands more.<sup>26</sup> Metaphor operates through the right hemisphere which is vital to our understanding of the world. Metaphor is lost in the literal, binary understanding of the left hemisphere, whereas, the right hemisphere is open up to new possibilities and feels perfectly comfortable in ambiguity and mystery. McGilchrist states,

It is metaphors that carry us across (that is what the word ‘metaphor’ means) the implied gap between language and the world, and make what would otherwise be a hermetically sealed system of signs capable of meaning something in terms of embodied experience. They are how we understand everything.<sup>27</sup>

Conversely, when we describe the world with explicit language (left hemisphere) we actually limit our ability to understand the world. “It follows that limiting the possible meaning of language by rendering it explicit also limits the possible meaning that could be found in the world.”

McGilchrist’s research became invaluable for our church as we discussed the importance of creating a discipling culture. In our early discussions it became clear we needed to create new language to describe discipleship. Many in the church were hung up on the explicit language with which they had been accustomed. This prevented us from looking beyond our previously held

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<sup>25</sup> McGilchrist, 446-448.

<sup>26</sup> McGilchrist, 343-344.

<sup>27</sup> McGilchrist, 178-182.

understandings of discipleship, which were becoming increasingly ineffective in our church community. By creating a metaphor with new visual symbols we expanded our understanding of discipleship, and increased our impact into a greater number of people's lives. Moreover, those who had become entrenched in their traditional understanding of discipleship found the fresh metaphor extremely helpful.

### **Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion***

Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist and professor at New York University's Stern School of Business. He specializes in the psychology of morality and the moral emotions. This book focuses on the theories of moral psychology, specifically, how we develop our beliefs and how people can truly change. Haidt makes the case that change can occur in people, but this change must occur through an intuitive polemic rather than through a polemic of reason. He asserts that arguing with people using rational arguments will never truly change the way people think about politics, morality and religion. There is some overlap with Haidt and McGilchrist's work which is why I included it in my thesis.

The author highlights Three Principles of Moral Psychology. First, "Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second."<sup>28</sup> He states, "The bottom line is that human minds, like animal minds, are constantly reacting intuitively to everything they perceive, and basing their responses on those reactions."<sup>29</sup> Haidt

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Pantheon Books, Kindle Edition, 2012 ), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 69.

believes that the key to producing changed behavior and not just good thinking will be found in rejecting rationalism and embracing intuitionism.<sup>30</sup> While this position is helpful for understanding how people change, it does not address the issues of when, if, and which beliefs should be retained and why.

The Second Principle of Moral Psychology is that, “There is more to morality than harm and fairness.”<sup>31</sup> Haidt references the work of Richard Shweder who identifies three major themes concerning morality. Shweder calls these the ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity. Each one of the three are based on a distinct idea about who and what a person really is.<sup>32</sup> Autonomy is the belief that, “people are, first and foremost, autonomous individuals with wants, needs, and preferences.”<sup>33</sup> People are therefore allowed a level of freedom to satisfy their wants, needs, and preferences as they see fit with little interference from others. Secondly, the theme of community which states that, “people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations.”<sup>34</sup> People are then identified through their participation in the community as they play their specific role. Thirdly, the ethic of divinity states, “People are not just animals with an extra serving of consciousness; they are children of God and should behave accordingly.”<sup>35</sup> All three of these ethics reveal the different ways we understand who we are and our role in larger society.

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<sup>30</sup> Haidt, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Haidt, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Haidt, 116.

<sup>33</sup> Haidt, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Haidt, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Haidt, 117.

The Third Principle is “Morality binds and blinds.” This principle concedes there are helpful aspects of shared religious morality, but it also cautions against it. He states, “We think the other side is blind to truth, reason, science, and common sense, but in fact everyone goes blind when talking about their sacred objects.”<sup>36</sup> For example, Haidt suggests that political liberals might have more difficulty understanding conservatives “because liberals often have difficulty understanding how the Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity foundations have anything to do with morality.”<sup>37</sup> He continues by noting the difficulty liberals have in seeing the “moral capital” that sustains a community.<sup>38</sup>

The author is not espousing a particular moral, theological or political position and is a self-identified pluralist. In fact, he argues for the opposite. He concludes, “Beware of anyone who insists that there is one true morality for all people, times, and places— particularly if that morality is founded upon a single moral foundation.”<sup>39</sup> Haidt believes that anyone who holds too firmly to their morality is in danger of becoming a fundamentalist. However, he does believe there is a necessary function to moral systems because they make cooperative societies possible.<sup>40</sup>

The reason this book was helpful for the thesis was that it caused our church to be suspicious of the things we held to be sacred. As we formed

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<sup>36</sup> Haidt, 364.

<sup>37</sup> Haidt,, 365.

<sup>38</sup> Haidt, 365.

<sup>39</sup> Haidt, 5256.

<sup>40</sup> Haidt, 314.



discussions around creating a discipling culture we learned that what we often disagreed over had little to do with morality and sacredness and more to do with methodology. We knew that each of us were entrenched in our own predetermined methodologies, and trying to reason others into our position would not work. We learned that we needed to create a new system which captured people's imaginations and did not have an embedded history attached to it.

There are dangers in Haidt's conclusions. Namely, his theories do not contain a meta-narrative which binds society's and cultures of all times together. In his social theory, morality is somewhat fluid rather than fixed. However, his caution of relying on right brain thinking to introduce others to new possibilities, as well as his acknowledgement of the importance of collective thinking, were invaluable as we formulated a strategy for discipleship.

### **George Lakhoff, Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate**

George Lakoff is the Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley and is now the Director of the Center for the Neural Mind & Society. His theory in cognitive linguistics asserts that an individual's experience and attitude towards sociopolitical issues is influenced by framing linguistic constructions. His research was helpful for my thesis by adding additional insight into how metaphor works, specifically, metaphorical images and their connection to our emotions. Lakhoff uses the example of how we see buildings as standing people. He uses the Twin Towers as an example of our connection to buildings (physical images) and emotions.

If we see the plane going through the building, and unconsciously we evoke the metaphor of the building as a head with the plane going through its temple, then we sense— unconsciously but powerfully— being shot through the temple. If we evoke the metaphor of the building as a person and see the building fall to the ground in pieces, then we sense— again unconsciously but powerfully— that we are falling to the ground in pieces. Our systems of metaphorical thought, interacting with our mirror neuron systems, turn external literal horrors into felt metaphorical horrors.<sup>41</sup>

The collapsing of the Twin Towers triggered a deep emotional response throughout the world. The World Trade Center was a “potent symbol tied into our understanding of our country and ourselves.”<sup>42</sup> The author goes on to state that, “Physical changes— violent ones— have been made to the brains of all Americans.”<sup>43</sup>

Lakhoff illustrates the powerful effects of dismantling our metaphorical images. Conversely, the opposite is also true. The construction of these images offer us a lot, which is why it is so devastating when they are damaged or destroyed. Our metaphorical images offer us a sense of identity, power, progress and ultimately hope. They carry a message that goes beyond the image itself!

This is something we considered as we constructed a metaphor and image for discipleship. The image we chose to illustrate discipleship was a bicycle, which for most people, had positive associations. It took some people back to their childhood when a bicycle was a symbol for freedom and growing up. For others, the bicycle image represented the feeling of being on a journey with

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<sup>41</sup> George Lakhoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2014), 105.

<sup>42</sup> George Lakhoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, 106-107.

<sup>43</sup> Lakhoff, 106-107.

others, being on a team and pursuing the same destination. The image itself without any explicit description carried a strong emotional connection for most people.

### **Kent Carlson & Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church***

Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken are pastors in Northern California. At one time they were pastoring one of the fastest growing churches in America. This book is the story of their evolution as a church from a growing “seeker-sensitive,” “attractional church” to a shrinking, “discipling,” “missional church.” As we started to move toward creating a discipling culture as a church, we found that we paralleled their journey. We were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with trying to provide programs and activities for people who were not growing in faith in Jesus. This book addresses the core of this problem for us and every church struggling with making disciples in a church culture that is more interested in making converts or filling seats with other Christians.

The authors reflect on their struggle with the conflicting values of the Church in the West and with the Kingdom of God: “Gradually, we began to get some clarity on a troubling truth: attracting people to church based on their consumer demands is in direct and irredeemable conflict with inviting people, in Jesus' words, to lose their lives in order to find them.”<sup>44</sup> “In other words, our “attractional” methods are not value neutral. We are training people as we attract them.”<sup>45</sup> In short, we are training people to continue their role as consumers.

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<sup>44</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When A Seeker Sensitive Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 321.

<sup>45</sup> Kent Carlson & Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church*, 691.

Church simply becomes another avenue for meeting their needs rather than challenging them to live their lives more fully and sacrificially for Jesus.

Through our journey we had to learn how to redefine success. In the book, the authors ask a fundamental question for every church leader: “To what extent have we oriented our church around the needs of people who have minimal interest in actually living as disciples of Jesus?”<sup>46</sup> For example, the authors note how we have placed an unhealthy focus on success through productivity. They note our focus on consumerism and pragmatism which drives many Christians in the West. “Instead of a particular brand of coffee or clothing line, we sell our various youth programs, worship styles and preaching abilities.”<sup>47</sup> These became foundational issues for our church as we grappled with the consumer culture represented in our community.

Carlson and Lueken note the importance of recognizing how we have manipulated biblical language and replaced it with a new evangelical language. We use phrases such as “walking in the spirit” and “going deeper,” both of which are an attempt to describe spiritual formation and discipleship. They note the problem with this language is that it replaces Kingdom language with language that, “makes us think we are in control.”<sup>48</sup> They argue that much of what we consider spiritual formation and discipleship are not things we control, but areas and opportunities where God is directing our lives.

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<sup>46</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 583-584.

<sup>47</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 803-804.

<sup>48</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 611-613.

## **Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, Building a Discipling Culture**

I chose to use this book for my thesis because it offered the most detailed look at what is referred to as the “missional model.” Breen and Cockram’s model of church planting has been widely embraced and found a lot of traction, especially in Post-Christian Europe. When I first began the thesis project, I did not have access to this book. As I continued in the formation of the thesis project, this book and others in its series offered invaluable insights into how Christian communities are formed and nourished.

Much of Breen and Cockram’s research and rich personal experience challenge modern North American assumptions about discipleship, ecclesiology and missiology and offers credible, historical alternatives. Specifically, they state,

For many churches, as they seek to create comfortable environments in the form of worship services or small groups, have lost their ability to challenge people in meaningful ways. Challenge may be given from the pulpit or stage on Sunday mornings, but challenge is always given best in the context of personal relationships.<sup>49</sup>

The authors contend that creating such an environment in the church creates a “cozy culture,” but does not create disciples. These environments, they note, are high on “invitation” but low on “challenge.”<sup>50</sup> Breen and Cockram provide an alternative “empowered culture” which is high on invitation and high on challenge. This is where they argue disciples are made.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement By Discipling People Like Jesus Did* (3DM, Kindle Edition, 2011) 208-210.

<sup>50</sup> Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 208-210.

<sup>51</sup> Breen and Cockram, 208-210.

The authors contend, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”<sup>52</sup> This statement gets at the heart of why so many churches struggle. As I stated in chapter one, our church had two groups of people with two different priorities, those who were interested in scale, and those interested in substance. Substance is a much more difficult priority to instill in many evangelical churches which celebrate scale over substance. Until we become suspicious of our models, recognizing their ineffectiveness, we will continue to draw people to communities, but not create disciples.

The authors challenge some of our modern assumptions by asking the following question, “Have we shifted our criteria for a good disciple as someone who shows up to our stuff, gives money and occasionally feeds poor people?”<sup>53</sup> If this is truly the case, our modern reductionistic understandings of discipleship might actually diminish the effectiveness of the church fulfilling the Great Commission. The authors' solution to this problem is to resist the wholesale adoption of modern Western expectations by focusing less on systems and placing more focus on substance. They state,

Put simply, building a culture of discipleship is the only way that you will produce the kind of community that Jesus and the New Testament writers would recognize as church. A dynamic living organism with sufficient organization to enable it to function effectively, yet remaining an authentic community that is full of the life of God.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Breen and Cockram, 100-101.

<sup>53</sup> Breen and Cockram, 106-108.

<sup>54</sup> Breen and Cockram, 243-245.

The authors note that organization is needed, but that a church is an organism. Organisms are by definition highly organized, but they are living things whose organization allows them the ability to exist and flourish. The beauty of the Early Church was their “organic” ability to immerse people into the substantive life of God in Christ. The authors state, “Often, immersion is about learning the nuances and finer points of something...with immersion, you see how all of these things start to connect together in even the smallest things.”<sup>55</sup>

The authors note that viewing the church organically in this scale and speed requires that we learn how to redefine success. They state, “Success is obedience to what the Father asks. Sometimes it comes with bigger churches, buildings and popularity. Often times it doesn’t. It’s about obedience. We don’t decide what the Father does.”<sup>56</sup> This was one of the primary issues our church struggled with as we had to define our metrics for success. The expectation of many in our church was that, “If you build it they will come.” This strategy did not work in the case of Westbrook Church. Rather than questioning the strategy, and theological assumptions supporting it, the early conclusions were we needed better people to make the system work.

The book provides a strong rationale for creating a vehicle for discipleship (huddle), lives that are open and accessible to each other and a common language.<sup>57</sup> They note that a huddle is different from a traditional small group.

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<sup>55</sup> Breen and Cockram, 490.

<sup>56</sup> Breen and Cockram, 490.

<sup>57</sup> Breen and Cockram, 536-540.

Instead, a huddle is a highly organic, intentional, and relational environment of four to ten people who meet regularly together to grow in faith.<sup>58</sup>

These communities (huddles) then need an easily transferable language that can be shared and passed on.<sup>59</sup> Specifically, they note how the change in the human brain over the past hundred years has resulted in our need for metaphors and images which is different than the oral and written culture of the past.<sup>60</sup> This shared language and metaphor not only informs who the community is, but it helps shape and transform the community.<sup>61</sup> In short, language becomes both the methodology and aim of transforming people into disciples. We intuitively knew this before we started our project, but the book simply reinforced this.

While this book offers a helpful critique of the American Church Model it doesn't offer much insight on how to help the American church. The perception in America is that we are still achieving a level of "success" with the current models of discipleship, which makes it especially difficult to see the reason to change current paradigms. The authors do not seem to understand, or choose not to address, the grip of the current models of discipleship. Nor, do they offer any suggestions for how to make the bridge between the current models and their proposed models. Having said this, the book became foundational for my project research by offering an alternative system for discipleship that has been

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<sup>58</sup> Breen and Cockram, 546-550.

<sup>59</sup> Breen and Cockram, 659.

<sup>60</sup> Breen and Cockram, 692-696.

<sup>61</sup> Breen and Cockram, 2646-2649.



tried and tested in another part of the world and which is achieving a level of momentum.

**George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again***

This book supported my thesis by providing a tested historical model (Celtic Church) for what we now refer to as the “missional church.” One of the central tenets of the Celtic model of St. Patrick is the idea of “belonging before belief.” The Celtic Model focused first on establishing community with people, secondly, engaging people in spiritual conversations about faith, and thirdly, inviting people to come to faith.<sup>62</sup> Hunter states if, “‘belonging comes before believing,’ then evangelism is now about ‘helping people to belong so that they can believe.’”<sup>63</sup> According to Hunter, “leaders were formed in community, and they invited receptive people into the community— before they had yet experienced or believed much of anything.”<sup>64</sup> This model worked incredibly well in the Celtic Church reaching the unreached “Barbarian” peoples by meeting them in their current state rather than trying to convert them and then invite them into the community of faith.

Another distinctive Hunter notes about the Celtic Church is their reliance on right brain thinking over left brain. This was a huge contrast to the Church in Rome which preferred left brain thinking which dealt with theological

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<sup>62</sup> George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Abingdon Press, Kindle Edition, 2010) 43.

<sup>63</sup> George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Hunter, 105.

abstractions, concepts and propositions.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, the Celtic Model engaged people with rich images, symbols, poetry and songs.<sup>66</sup> Instead of using Roman left-brained polemics for the validity of the Christian faith, they painted beautiful word pictures which connected with people's emotions and imaginations.<sup>67</sup> This methodology was looser than the Roman model and more reliant on the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. It tapped into the universal character of the Christian faith and naturally translated to the Celtic tribes.<sup>68</sup>

Hunter notes the Celtic Church also focused less on individualism and more on community. This included a less hierarchal understanding of the clergy and laity. The Celtic Church was able to reach out to the lost by meeting their physical, emotional and spiritual needs and by engaging them in a two-way conversation.<sup>69</sup> Also, they accomplished this through indigenous teams, rather than through official Roman clergy. In short, it was a lay movement!<sup>70</sup>

Hunter's research helped our project by demonstrating the shifting needs of the average postmodern person, and some of the ways the Ancient Celtic Church met those needs. Hunter states,

As the Enlightenment has faded, postmodern people are increasingly suspicious of people and institutions. They are rediscovering their intuition, and they own and trust their feelings more. They take in the world through what they see, touch, and experience— not just through what they hear— and they explore spirituality and the supernatural.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Hunter, 67.

<sup>66</sup> Hunter, 9-10.

<sup>67</sup> Hunter, 84.

<sup>68</sup> Hunter, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Hunter, 105.

<sup>70</sup> Hunter, 99.

<sup>71</sup> Hunter, 103.

Hunter is describing the cultural milieu of our age and the church's need to re-evaluate our methodology of reaching the lost by re-engaging their imaginations. It may be inaccurate to say the Western World is living in "Post-Enlightenment," since we have not fully abandoned it, but we must understand the changing climate and refer back to trusted forms of mission which had great impact. Hunter does a great job in this book of not forcing this reality on the modern church, but suggesting it to us by opening our imaginations.

This book was a great compendium to Breen's work. It provided a larger historical setting for the missional church. The author illustrates the impact of when the Roman Church and the Celtic Church combined forces. Whereas the Church in Rome provided institutional reliability, the Church in Ireland provided an organic model, which allowed for quicker growth. Sadly, the Church of Rome prevailed in the end and the Celtic model lost its impact, in part because it lacked the institutional integrity to stand the test of time. However, both models are alive in the modern church.

When I was developing my project it was clear that any effective model in our current age needed to include the elements of the Church in Rome and Ireland. We still need institutional organization and integrity represented in the Church of Rome, but we also need loosely organized and organic movements which can uniquely reach the unreached. In designing my project I was sensitive to not move to either extreme, but instead taking elements of both. My project does not follow exactly the model of what is referred to as the missional church, but it does borrow some of its core elements. For example, our church still

needed to exist as an institution, but we were not trusting the institution itself to be the primary means by which the lost are reached. Hunter's book was invaluable for helping me see the nuances in our specific setting and adapt them as needed for our context.

### **Tom Mercer, *The Word is Smaller Than You Think***

This book provided a link between the First Century understanding of *oikos* and its expression in the modern church. The book also contained elements of the missional church found in the other works cited, specifically in the area of missiology. Mercer makes a strong argument for moving away from the traditional leader-centered ministry and moving towards the community-centered model.<sup>72</sup> He notes the ineffectiveness of the leader-centric models of most American churches by stating,

...even with all of our emphasis on church leadership, preaching and vision over the past several decades (to say nothing of our marketing campaigns), we can still only talk two out of every ten Americans into coming into a building once a week to listen to us "anointed" leaders preach, yet ten out of ten Americans are interacting with the church on a daily basis.<sup>73</sup>

Mercer is noting how we can extend the reach of the church, not by focusing on the Sunday morning experience which is limited to one leader, but by recognizing the missional force the church represents in its people.

The title of the book is taken from the New Testament understanding of *oikos* as a community of 8-15 people in your sphere of influence. Mercer asserts

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<sup>72</sup> Tom Mercer, *8 to 15, The World Is Smaller Than You Think* (Oikos Books. Kindle Edition, 2013), 152-153.

<sup>73</sup> Tom Mercer, *8 to 15*, 175-177.

that God has strategically placed these people in our lives as our naturally occurring mission field.<sup>74</sup> He cautions the reader to not view oikos as a system or program, but as the core value of the church.<sup>75</sup> Rather than the church providing programs for evangelism, he makes the point that churches should exist to “facilitate strategic partnerships with local Christians” in order fulfill the Great Commission.<sup>76</sup> The beauty of this model is that it puts the responsibility back on the entire body rather than the “professional” Christians.

Another element of the book that I found especially helpful in my project was the author’s insistence on keeping people connected to their oikos after their conversion. He states, “ And our determination to relationally separate new believers from their pagan pasts and acculturate them into our “fellowships” can actually sabotage a local church ministry by short-circuiting the organic process of world-change.”<sup>77</sup> Mercer refers to this approach to as the “extrationist” thinking. He notes that it disregarded one’s oikos as a hindrance to one’s spiritual growth and cut people off from their natural missional opportunities.<sup>78</sup>

Mercer notes that the church traditionally set aside a season of formal training for new believers which cut them off from their community and exchanged it with a new Christian community. The result was that the new believers lost months or even years of opportunities to reach those lost in their own oikos. The other unfortunate side affect was that when the new believers

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<sup>74</sup> Mercer, 249-252.

<sup>75</sup> Mercer, 590-592.

<sup>76</sup> Mercer, 1809-1811.

<sup>77</sup> Mercer, 704-706.

<sup>78</sup> Mercer, 712-716.

tried to reengage their oikos they found themselves disconnected from the group they would have had the greatest possibility of reaching for Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

Mercer notes the overall simplicity of “cold evangelism,” that is, finding a stranger, engaging them in a spiritual conversation never to see them again. The oikos model is a much more difficult model for reaching our oikos. After all, the people in our immediate community are the ones who will see us live out the Gospel rather than simply hear about it in our words. This kind of evangelism requires that the believers seriously consider how they are living in a Christ-like manner. The adverse is also true, that if the believer is truly transformed, the people who know them best will see the legitimacy of their conversation.<sup>80</sup>

This book offered additional information for my thesis concerning all three of the areas of discipleship, ecclesiology and missiology. Mercer offers a strong corrective, but also runs into the problem of universalizing a particular. The book is a necessary corrective for a large majority of evangelical methodologies, but also overstates the point for a new/ancient model. While I found Mercer’s methodology insightful and helpful for my thesis, I disagreed with some of his conclusions. Specifically, I disagreed that the purpose of reaching one’s oikos is so that they can invite people to church, rather than bringing the church to the people. Mercer seems to view oikos primarily through a missiological lens and falls short of developing it as an ecclesiological model. This important nuance distinguishes Mercer’s model from the missional model represented in Hunter’s work.

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<sup>79</sup> Mercer, 706-709.

<sup>80</sup> Mercer, 1897-1901.

## CHAPTER IV: PROJECT DESIGN, NO DROP RIDE

My family recently moved back to our home town after a twenty year trek across the country. During that time we lived in three different states with very different physical and relational geographies. We hail from the beaches of Southern California, where my wife and I both grew up. When we first left our hometown we left the beach for the stunning yet arid California Desert. From there we moved to the Rocky Mountains of Denver, Colorado. Our last move took us to Southeastern Wisconsin where we exchanged the mountains for beautiful lakes, forests and rolling hills. Now we are back where we started in warm and sunny Southern California.

But what has shaped our family over the past twenty years has not simply been the destination, but the journey. Everywhere we traveled we embarked as a team. Nobody got left behind on the journey no matter how challenging the stage of the trek. We experienced the full range of human experience, sometimes we were broken down on the side of the road, and at other times, moving decidedly and deliberately toward our destination. Our kids learned from us along the way and my wife and I definitely learned from them. Every moment we were soaking in all the shared experiences of lives lived together. For our family, and perhaps every family, it has never been just about the destination, but the journey itself!

As I was formulating this thesis-project I couldn't help but conclude that my family's journey mirrored the journey of every disciple and every church. The church is family on a journey! As such we are shaped by the shared experiences of the journey as well as the images we experienced along the way. I explored

this theologically in chapter two with the Biblical themes of spiritual pilgrimage, telos, the New Testament concept of oikos and in chapter three with the “missional church.”

The genesis of the project came out of a teaching series from Westbrook Church in the Fall of 2012. The series was entitled “Journey to Telos.” In the series I explored how a life in Christ is the goal (telos) of our faith. In the general sense, telos means, “maturity, outcome, culmination, fulfillment or purpose, completion, perfection, final step, supreme stage, crown, goal, maturity, result, conclusion, end, cessation.”<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament the goal (telos) of faith in Christ is salvation. The Apostle Peter writes,

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result (telos) of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Pt 1:8-9 [NIV]).

The Apostle Paul writes that telos is also the destiny of the believer. “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result (telos) is eternal life” (Rom 6:22 [NIV]). Telos is the goal or destiny of life and faith, but also includes the purpose behind it. It is everything towards which our lives point! Mike Breen states, “Jesus is the portal to the future that we long for. When we come to Jesus, we touch the future. When Jesus reaches out and touches us, the future touches our lives.”<sup>2</sup> He is, after all, the Alpha and Omega.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972) 49-50.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (3DM, Kindle Edition, 2012) 2042-2043.



We see this evidenced in the Lord's Prayer when Jesus directs his believers to pray, "... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10 [NIV]). The Lord's will is that Heaven would be brought to earth. That is, God's present (and our future), in some form, would become a present reality. In a sense, the Lord is encouraging us to pray that we would experience the taste of our final destination in our present journey. This Biblical concept captured people's imaginations in the church which proved valuable with the project.

It was discovered through the research of Ian McGihchrist how the different hemispheres of the brain function, either encouraging new ideas (right brain) or protecting old ideas (left brain). The biggest challenge with the thesis-project was convincing "mature" believers that change was needed. Many of these believers leaned toward left brain thinking and were fiercely loyal to their systems. When they were given new information, they had the tendency to use the new information to confirm what they already believed rather than question their assumptions.

The traditionalist would keep the group tethered to the past in the room (left brain) which was needed. There was also a need for innovators (right brain) who would challenge the rest of the group with an alternative future. It was essential that both groups appreciate the creative process and not just the final product. Any attempts at short-circuiting the process would not have allowed the team to be successful. Moreover, an environment of mutual respect needed to be

created where ideas could both be encouraged and challenged. Jonathan Haidt notes what can happen when such an environment is created,

We should not expect individuals to produce good, open-minded, truth-seeking reasoning, particularly when self-interest or reputational concerns are in play. But if you put individuals together in the right way, such that some individuals can use their reasoning powers to disconfirm the claims of others, and all individuals feel some common bond or shared fate that allows them to interact civilly, you can create a group that ends up producing good reasoning as an emergent property of the social system.<sup>3</sup>

When a group such as the above mentioned gathers, they almost always have the ability and wisdom to meet whatever demands are presented.<sup>4</sup> My hope for this thesis-project was that new values and properties would emerge which would be bigger than the initial demand presented.

The thesis-project is, "How to create a discipling culture through the development of shared metaphor." Once the group was assembled they were tasked with two objectives. They were first tasked with creating a new and collective language for discipleship. The language also had to be easily and universally understood by all ages. It would also need to be conveyed through an image. Their second, and related objective was to focus on culture versus strategy.

As I mentioned in chapter one, whenever the church discussed discipleship they had the tendency to focus on strategy, and this is where they would get stuck. The leadership believed that in order to create a preferred future

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition, 2012) 105.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Kindle Edition, 2008) 24.

for discipleship, there needed to be a shift in language. In other words, the transformation needed to first be linguistic.<sup>5</sup> The authors of *Essentials of Sociology* state how essential language is for shaping reality,

A common language is often the most obvious outward sign that people share a common culture ... For this reason, groups seeking to mobilize their members often insist on their own distinct language ... and according to some linguists, languages not only symbolize our culture but also help create a framework in which culture develops, arguing that grammar, structures and categories embodied in each language influence how its speakers see reality.<sup>6</sup>

The new language needed to focus on identity rather than strategy. The hope was that once new language was introduced and established a new culture would begin to emerge. The new culture would also have to be connected to the present culture. In other words, we could not change the current church culture overnight by simply introducing new language. The past, present and future cultures needed to share the same historical essence of Westbrook. Moreover, the new language would shape an emerging culture which would inform new strategies and would result in more people following Jesus.

A group of 14 people were assembled from different walks of life, to collaborate and develop new language and an image for discipleship. The group included a few staff and elders, but consisted mostly of congregants with no official title. Seven women and seven men were included who had demonstrated strong emotional and spiritual health and who were committed to Westbrook Church. There were two participants in their sixties, three in their mid to late

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> David B. Brinkerhoff, Lynn K. White, Suzanne T. Ortega, *Essentials on Sociology* (Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing, 2007) 38-39.

fifties, five in their forties, three in their thirties, and one individual in his twenties. Each participant appreciated collaboration and valued process. Also, dominating personalities were avoided who would demand immediate results. Those chosen needed to be comfortable with the often slow and tedious process of birthing new ideas.

I intentionally chose not to attend the sessions, but entrusted the facilitation to a professional who helps churches and organizations like ours. I was concerned that my presence in the room would affect the way people expressed their ideas. Specifically, people's tendency to use overly spiritualized terms. I also felt that in order for there to be full ownership of the language, others needed to create it. I needed a trusted and experienced facilitator for this project to be a success. I found that person in my close friend, colleague and Westbrook member, Greg Marshall.

Greg works with CI Design in Milwaukee. Greg is a seasoned leader who has helped numerous churches and companies find their corporate identity through the same process through which he led us. He has a unique gift to draw out the creativity of a group and manage the resulting conflicting ideas. Greg also holds a Master's Degree in Theology from Trinity Theological Seminary and views the world through a theological lens. He was an invaluable asset to this whole process, and we could not have done it without him!

The first session involved Greg giving the group a sheet of paper with several nonsensical sentences. As the group read the sheet of paper, they were asked to state the subject to which the sentences referred. No one from the

group was able to identify the subject. He revealed the subject to the group, demonstrating how language is ineffective if we do not know to what we are referencing. Greg demonstrated to the group that all language must be referential!

During session one, Greg gave the group a piece of paper and some crayons. The group was told to describe the spiritual journey. They were encouraged to be creative, think outside the box, and create a picture for discipleship. The initial process required the use of the right brain over the left brain. According to Ian McGilchrist,

If we espouse the view of the left hemisphere we will never find meaning, because it cannot understand. It has no way to break out of the system of signs. It does not understand the power of metaphor, through which alone meaning would come about. It is not in touch.<sup>7</sup>

Greg's intention was to bring people back to the way they interpreted the world as a child. He attempted to unlock the creative part of each person's brain. His premise was as we get older our left brain begins to protect what we know (confirmation bias) which can close us off to new experiences. The process also pulled everyone into the conversation, helped people feel heard, and prepared them for the next steps.

The drawing exercise was the first step of getting the group on the same page. To align people we needed to first appeal to the group's right brain. The drawing allowed the participants to articulate their unedited responses. As the group began to converse around the drawings, the right and left brain began to

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<sup>7</sup> Ian McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning* (Yale University Press, Kindle Edition, 2012) 446-448.

collaborate. The facilitator stated, “When we lead with right brain, RB always invites the left side to participate. When we lead with LB (info, lists, abstract language), then LB never invites right brain to question assumptions.”<sup>8</sup> Ian McGilchrist confirms this premise by stating, “One way of looking at the differences would be to say that while the left hemisphere’s *raison d’être* is to narrow things down to a certainty, the right hemisphere’s is to open them up to possibilities.”<sup>9</sup> The process needed to include both hemispheres, but the order of how we engaged the hemispheres was crucial. Right hemisphere first and left hemisphere second.

As the group finished their pictures they were encouraged to share it with the rest of the group. Some of the pictures created were a football stadium, a tree by a river, a baton hand off, a VW Beetle, a cross-country road trip and a bicycle. Each member of the group was asked to shared why they chose the picture they drew to describe discipleship. In doing this we accomplished two things: First, we created a sense of community and trust. None of the group members felt competent as artists and there was a lot of laughter when people showed their pictures to the rest of the group. Second, in sharing the pictures a synergy was created with the group. Creativity begat creativity.

During session two, the facilitator circled back to people’s pictures. When the picture of the bicycle came up the artist expanded on why they felt a bicycle represented discipleship. As they were elaborating another group member said, “You’re describing a no drop ride.” The facilitator asked this member what they

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<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Greg Marshall on 4/11/17 at 10:41a.m.

<sup>9</sup> Ian McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*, 151.

meant by their statement. The individual shared that a No Drop Ride is a term in the cycling world which refers to when a group of cyclists start and finish a ride together. They went on to say that this is in contrast to a ride where a cyclist focuses on finishing first as an individual rather than a team. They stated that on a No Drop Ride, if a cyclist breaks down on the side of the road, at least one cyclist from their group will pull aside and help them get back on the road. On some rides, even the entire peloton will stop and help the rider in need.

When the rest of the group heard this there was a visceral reaction. The group agreed it was a compelling metaphor for the spiritual journey. As the conversation continued, everyone agreed that this did not mean the same thing as, “No man left behind.” It did mean that as long as people are committed to the journey and to Jesus, the community would be committed to them. The group conceded that some will choose to select out of the journey for a myriad of reasons. But for those who are committed to the journey, there would be a community surrounding them who would be committed to them and to finishing strongly together.

Interestingly, the person who offered the No Drop Ride metaphor is a left hemisphere dominant thinker, whereas the person who drew the picture of the bicycle is more of right hemisphere dominant thinker. These two individuals were a picture of how individuals (and the brain) can collaborate and extrapolate meaning from our environment. Additionally, when the rest of the group began to develop the metaphor, both individuals who first presented the metaphor wanted to retract their ideas, feeling they were insufficient to describe discipleship. This

illustrated how the left hemisphere can close off creativity in an attempt to create order. Rather than tabling the idea, the facilitator continued the conversation and pulled in the other participants to provide additional substance to the metaphor. This initial process took two, two and a half hour sessions.

During this session, the group drafted a 5, 10, and 20 second script which further defined a No Drop Ride. The script would become the “elevator talk,” summarizing discipleship at Westbrook Church. It was geared toward everyone regardless of their background or exposure to Christianity. When people would ask what our church was all about we would state, “It’s a No Drop Ride.”

The elevator talk was created in order to capture people’s imaginations. Through the research and group sessions, Greg and I agreed that engaging the right hemisphere of the brain first was the most effective way to get people to receive new information. When new people would hear the elevator talk for the first time, their curiosity would be peaked and they would inevitably ask follow up questions. Again, Ian McGilchrist states,

It is metaphors that carry us across (that is what the word ‘metaphor’ means) the implied gap between language and the world, and make what would otherwise be a hermetically sealed system of signs capable of meaning something in terms of embodied experience. They are how we understand everything.<sup>10</sup>

He is describing the essential nature of a metaphor and its ability to allow us to understand the world around us, all of which originates in the right hemisphere.

In session three the team continued exploring how the metaphor might shape our methodology for discipleship as well as our ecclesiastical and

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<sup>10</sup> McGilchrist, 178-182.



missiological purposes. A short multi-page brand story-guide was created. After the guide was developed, the facilitator presented it to the Westbrook Elders and to me. It captured the imaginations of the team. There were a few elders on the metaphor team, yet they were silent about the final product, being careful to not discuss details of the project with the rest of the elder council before the project was introduced.

The metaphor was tested with the church staff and finally with the congregation. Many connected with it conceptually. There was a brief ceremony in a church service, where the participants were invited onto the stage and recognized for their hard work. This created space where the team could be appreciated for their hard work, and at the same time, illustrate to the congregation the collaborative process. Following the ceremony, a four week sermon series was crafted presenting the new metaphor and theological position to the congregation. Pictures of bicycles were placed around the church in various locations. The congregation interacted well with the metaphor and began adopting the language quickly!

Over the following months the story began to be institutionalized. First, the decision was made by the Westbrook Church leadership to restructure some of the ministries in order to focus on discipleship as articulated by the metaphor. Long-standing ministries were canceled because they were no longer in alignment with the new metaphor and model for discipleship. The Church leadership had to navigate through people's disappointments, but in the end most people agree that the changes were needed. Second, the ministries which

were already in alignment with the metaphor, namely our Life Group Ministry were given more resources.

The hope for this thesis-project was that a shared metaphor would develop a functional methodology which would provide increased alignment to our mission to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission. Another hope was that new metics would be generated which would be witnessed in the more effectiveness in making disciples. The conceptual language that came out of the focus group was expanded upon by the facilitator and me. I added supporting theological and historical content in the final product, but this was truly a group project.

Below is the story guide represented in brackets.<sup>11</sup> It includes the unpacking of the metaphor as well as the theological foundation from which it was derived. This document was the first draft that was shared with the congregation. It contained the verbiage the metaphor team had written. The document was used as the theological and conceptual underpinning of how Westbrook envisioned discipleship. It was used to create a four week preaching series after the completion of the project and was used in other teaching contexts throughout the church. It provides what became the common reference point for the church concerning discipleship.

### **No Drop Ride**

We are on a journey with twists and turns; we Ride Together, Train Together and Cheer One Another On to ride and finish well. What does that say

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<sup>11</sup> Pages 83-89.

about us? Life is complex and often unpredictable. In our community at any given moment, we have people who are suffering, others are celebrating, and many are someplace in the middle. Regardless of what our individual life experiences are like, we're on the road of discipleship together. The goal is to become like the one we follow, Jesus. And it's a process that is life-giving and satisfying, even if challenging.

The destination is not a place. It's a way of life. It is not stagnate and rigid, but dynamic and relational. In other words, the goal of our lives is not to just get to Heaven in the end, but in every moment enjoy a life of love and fellowship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and His church. We grow and mature as followers of Jesus as we learn together how to let His life and love manifest in our lives every day. There are some who are further along on their journey and willing to help others around them. No one is fully mature, but we are maturing everyday as we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Growth along the way is as important as the destination itself. We expect growth in our individual lives and in the life of the collective Westbrook Church community. This means discipleship<sup>13</sup> requires individual as well as group responsibility. Each of us has a responsibility for ourselves, as we also contribute to the health and maturity of the whole group. This growth is only made possible through God's active presence in our lives. Jesus says, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor 3:18.

<sup>13</sup> We did not abandon the word discipleship in exchange for the metaphor. Instead, we used it after we referenced the new language. This metaphor provided the frame by which we could use the word.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (Jn 15:4[NIV]). Dallas Willard states, “True, as Jesus said, 'Without me you can do nothing.' But it is also true that if we do nothing it will be without him.”<sup>14</sup>

Individuals: We believe that as we align our individual lives, in other words, our habits, desires, passions, intentions, and relationships, with the intended design of our Triune Creator, we will see an increased relational, emotional and spiritual health in ourselves and each other. This change will be observable in uniquely different ways. Our hope is that we, as individuals, will learn to see ourselves honestly and clearly as we embrace the process of discipleship. Os Guinness notes that the church throughout history has had the unique ability to be both “self-critical and self-corrective.”<sup>15</sup> We want to look at our motives and intentions suspiciously and make the necessary corrections in our lives when they do not reflect God’s heart and priorities.

Church Community: The fruit of discipleship is also observable in the life of our church as a whole. Our culture, and norms of our church community, should reflect an increasingly collaborative, unified and spiritually healthy pattern. We are the body of Christ, and this should transform the manner in which we handle conflict, challenges, and successes. As new creations in Christ we will increasingly reflect His character by continually being reconciled to God and others. We will learn to view each other from the perspective of Jesus and live as fellow ambassadors for him.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dallas Willard, *Christian Herald* (U.K.) April 14, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2014) 79.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor 5:16-20.

Wider Community: Discipleship produces growth in individuals, in the church body, and in the wider communities that are represented by our members and regular participants. We do not only look for inward for signs of growth, but we look out into the places we inhabit on a regular basis for evidence of our transformed lives. As a part of our discipleship at Westbrook Church we ask the question, “Am I contributing increasingly to the flourishing of my family and workplace as I follow Jesus?” Are the institutions and industries we are a part of flourishing because we, the church, are living on mission with Jesus? These are metrics with which we want to measure our effectiveness of living out the Great Commandment and Great Commission.

Ride Together: This happens, in part, as we intentionally do life with one another and our neighbors. We learn from one another as we share in the struggles and successes of life. When we share life together, God gives us greater opportunities to engage people naturally in conversations about faith.<sup>17</sup> Discipleship happens in the context of sharing life experiences, a glass of wine, a meal, and not just with other Christians, but also with others who may not believe in Jesus. This group will inevitably include people we enjoy being with, and people with whom we may have difficulty spending time.<sup>18</sup>

We will invite any and all on the No Drop Ride. In order to ride together effectively, we need to be intentional about creating space in people’s already busy lives where they can connect with others inside and outside the church.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Deut 6:7.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Thes 5:14.

<sup>19</sup> Col 4:5.

This means that as a church we will not over-schedule our fellow sojourners with too many church activities and programs that may make us feel better about what we are doing, but have minimal effect in making disciples. This kind of thinking will only prevent us from engaging and inviting our neighbors, co-workers and others in our community into a living relationship with the Triune God. We want to be intentional about making the most of every opportunity God gives us to reach our oikos for Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

We will all learn from each other, and discipleship happens as we intentionally pursue Jesus and others. We will learn to identify with other's lives and perspectives, while loving them in the same manner in which God loves us. We choose to live like Jesus, who loves us by pursuing us, identifying with us and loving us sacrificially.<sup>21</sup> This is the context in which we learn to trust and follow Him, a critical part of discipleship.

Training: God's Word: An equally important part of discipleship is pulling off the main road to train and prepare ourselves and one another for the journey ahead. The training allows us to make sense of, and respond wisely to, our life experiences in light of God's Word. An absolutely critical part of discipleship is the process of learning God's Word, the Bible, in order to know God more personally and make sense of and respond in faithfulness to God in all areas of life. The Word of God is alive and active and as we read, reflect, digest and live out its wisdom we experience God's power in our lives.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Col 4:5.

<sup>21</sup> Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; Heb 4:15; Rom 3.

<sup>22</sup> Rom 8:11.

The Bible is our primary revelation of who God is, what he has done, what he will do, and our responsibility in light of this truth. We have made it a high priority to encourage personal and group study, as well as one-on-one learning. We provide regular opportunities for people to learn God's Word in community. This includes Sunday worship services, life groups, and intentional one-on-one relationships. We all share the responsibility of learning and trusting in God's Word together in a collaborative way. We will discourage any potential arrogance that may come by gaining more knowledge, but not expressing it through love.<sup>23</sup> We recognize that we are all apprentices of Jesus and are still learning how to live with fidelity towards him. He is the reason for the journey and destination of our faith.<sup>24</sup>

Cheering for each other: Along the way, we cheer for each other and stay committed to each other's ride. In the end, discipleship is about all of us learning to follow Jesus and become more like him. We may not have the opportunity to live closely alongside everyone in our church community and we may never have the opportunity to study God's Word with everyone either. But we will always have the ability to cheer for one another.

Throughout the Bible, God's people are called to encourage and celebrate each other with words, gifts, prayer and actions. We see this in the life of Paul, Peter and others. Cheering each other on, speaking encouragement into one another's lives, is not only essential for the receiver of such things; it is also an

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor 8:1-3.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Pt 1:9.

essential part of discipleship to provide it for others.<sup>25</sup> Cheering for others allows us to step outside of ourselves, becoming salt and light in our own community. The goal of discipleship, the way of life described above, is to learn to follow Jesus and become more like Him as individuals and as a community. It is growth that happens as we partner with Him, relying on His power that works in us as we intentionally align our lives to the relational and life patterns of Jesus.”<sup>26</sup>

The No Drop Ride metaphor created alignment with the pastors, elders and congregation. Westbrook now had a common language which was shaped by the community itself and not simply the official leaders. By including the community, ownership increased which, in turn, accelerated its adoption. Everyone, regardless of age or background, could relate to a journey and a bicycle. It was not a traditional program to be tacked onto everything else we were doing as a church. Neither was it a new strategy or gimmick we employed to get people “into church” and it didn’t require additional financial or people resources. It did, however, become the primary lens by which we viewed everything!

The project became the catalyst for making some necessary changes. By reducing the number of activities and programs, we were able to focus a significant portion of our attention on creating and nourishing the environment described in the metaphor. This included changing the staffing structure in order to better support the new metaphor. For example, we moved the Student Ministry Pastor, Jake Manne, into the role of Pastor of Connections. We were able to do

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<sup>25</sup> Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thes 5:11.

<sup>26</sup> Col 1:28-29.



this since the middle school and high school ministries would now flow primarily out of our life groups. We also moved the Deployment Pastor, Amy Thompson, into the role of Pastor of Missional Life. Jake was now responsible for connecting people on the first part of the journey, helping new and existing people to join the No Drop Ride. Both pastors shared the responsibility of training and pouring into our life group leaders. Amy was responsible for encouraging and exhorting the life groups to serve in the community and world.

Our life group ministry was chosen as the primary conduit where discipleship occurred. We wanted every life group to contain four different components. We wanted people to connect, grow, share, and serve together. The life groups existing prior to the project shared life, studied the Bible, and served each other, but the language allowed us to be more intentional rather than accidental. It heightened the responsibility of every group member. Every life group was seen as an extension of a group member's *oikos*, and for some, even their primary *oikos*. The groups treated each other as members of their own family. When there was a need in the group, people no longer called the church office as the first call, but instead called their fellow life group members. The life group leaders were no longer facilitators of Bibles, but became shepherds in their *oikos*.

Many of these groups adopted ministries in the community where they served on a regular basis. Some served in local homeless shelters, food and clothing pantries, halfway houses, and with our human trafficking ministry. These groups were not stuck in a self-referential loop, but looked to the needs of those

outside the group as a core component. Prior to the project we had placed a great deal of focus on global missions, which often meant sending missionaries to go to other countries. While we continued to support our traditional missions focus, we were now inviting everyone to be on mission with Jesus, even if they didn't carry the official title "missionary." The previous model had the tendency, at least perceived, to elevate the role of the missionary. Missions was no longer a thing or something we did, but instead it flowed out of identity. In other words, missions changed from a noun and verb to an adjective.

Some of the life groups centered on an affinity such as stage of life, or a specific area of interest. But, most people chose to be in mixed groups which included empty nesters, young parents, single people and married couples. One of our life groups chose to create a community around knitting. They still operated like a normal life group, but also spent their time sharing and connecting around knitting. The group included women, young and old, believers and non-believers, and taught them how to knit. These women knit for new born babies in the church, pregnant and unwed mothers throughout the community, and individuals who had recently lost a loved one. The shepherd of that group led these women to serve on behalf of Jesus without their full understanding of it. They were not only "belonging before believing," they were "serving before surrendering." Several of the women in this group eventually came to faith in Jesus and joined the No Drop Ride.

The simplicity of the metaphor made it much easier for people to invite others into a life of discipleship. The congregation now had a simple script to

describe the essence of our church. Evangelism was no longer a program or impersonal formula we followed, but flowed out of who we were as a community. As with the Celtic Church, we invited people to belong before we asked for them to believe. Mike Breen picks up this sentiment by writing, “In our culture today, longing to belong makes authentic community a very powerful drawing force.”<sup>27</sup> He goes on to write, “People are starving for community. So hungry, in fact, they will join others simply because they are asked to.”<sup>28</sup> We found this to be true of our experience as people were eager to join life groups.

In fact community is not just important in and of itself. It is important because it is one of the primary ways by which we encounter God and one of the primary ways in which we grow as disciples. Mike Breen states, “The Bible also teaches us that we find ourselves and true fulfillment not in isolation, not even as we engage with one another, but rather when we relate to God through one another.”<sup>29</sup> Discipleship was no longer seen an individual endeavor, but became a community endeavor. To be a part of the Westbrook Community meant that you would engage in the process of spiritual growth. The community itself had a responsibility to become mature. Mike Breen makes this point in *Building a Discipling Culture*, by noting how after the Gospels, there is no mention of the word disciple. Instead, he argues as do others, that the responsibility of

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<sup>27</sup> Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to release a missional movement* by discipling people like Jesus did (3DM, Kindle Edition, 2011) 2495.

<sup>28</sup> Breen, 1209.

<sup>29</sup> Breen, 1165.

discipleship no longer fell to a few select teachers and leaders, but to the church itself.<sup>30</sup>

One of the ways we translated this at Westbrook was including our children in the larger church service. We also changed the language to speak of our children and youth not as the “future church,” but as full participants of “the church.” We produced a first communion guide for families explaining the sacrament of communion. After families went through the guide with their children, we celebrated with a large pancake breakfast before their first communion. We increased communion to twice a month and included the children before we dismissed them to their Sunday School classes. This had a profound impact on our children and our families as they shared this experience. Church became a part of an extended oikos for the children and their families.

Another component we developed from the No Drop Ride was a once a month event entitled, “Curbside.” This was a forty-five minute seminar which aided the Training Together component. It included a short 15-20 minute presentation with an equal time allocated for discussion around the topic. This seminar took place immediately after the church service. The topics for the “Curbside” related to the monthly sermon series. We discussed issues such as grief, loss, spiritual disciplines, hospitality, how to share your faith, leadership, power, how to engage culture to name a few. Many life groups attended the “Curbsides” together and discussed the topic later that week when they met as a group. This minimalistic format did not require a huge investment in time, but

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (3DM, Kindle Edition, 2012) 1751-1756.

provided a powerful primer for spiritual growth. The “Curbsides” were a great way to “pull over to the side of the road” so everyone could get refreshed and strengthened on their journey.

Our life groups took a break in the summer. Many chose to continue to meet, but with less structure than during the rest of the year. During the summer, we offered an entry level event for people to get connected to the Westbrook Community. We called this event “Westbrook Table.” Some of these tables were hosted by life group leaders in an attempt to get people connected to their group. Other groups were led by individuals who wanted to get connected to a larger segment of the church than their own life group. These tables, held in homes, included a meal, and discussion around some general questions which allowed people the chance to get to know each other better. These tables were open to anyone, but we kept each Westbrook Table limited to around 8-12 to maximize the connection between those who attended. Some who attended had been a part of the church for many years, but had never been involved beyond attending an occasional Sunday morning service.

Another outcome from the No Drop Ride was that authority was returned to the congregation. One of the significant issues we faced prior to the project was the question of what we were going to do to grow the church. The obvious assumption by people who asked the question was, “What are the staff and elders going to do to grow the church?” The project placed the responsibility back on the entire congregation rather than those with official titles. This provided the foundation for a more flat leadership structure, which created

increased ownership for our future, and also created a strong sense of accountability for everyone. The pastors and elders were able to function as co-shepherds along with the life group leaders and other high capacity leaders. Because there was increased ownership with the community, the elders and pastors felt a tremendous burden lifted and the congregation felt empowered to continue their investment in the church.

Another result was that people felt a stronger sense of responsibility for the large facility in which we were residing. As I stated in chapter 1, the debt was a crippling factor in our ability to grow the church in the traditional manner of hiring staff and funding programs. People not only felt a strong connection to the people of Westbrook, but to the place where we worshipped. Most of our building and grounds team consisted of volunteers. This team oversaw the HVAC, mowing, snow removal, landscaping, plumbing and construction. This was no small task since we had 30 acres of land and a huge facility.

In chapter 5, I will assess the metrics of the “No Drop Ride” Project. Specifically we will explore the validity of our four-fold assumptions:

- A unified definition could be created through collaboration with church leadership and the rest of the congregation.
- An increased sense of belonging would be experienced by those who participated.
- A heightened sense of expectation for spiritual growth would emerge leading to an increased heart for the world outside of Christ.

- This shared definition would lead to metrics by which the congregation could measure its growth and transformation inside and outside the church.

We will also assess whether or not Westbrook's ability to fulfill the Great Commission and Great Commandment were increased as the result of the No Drop Ride project.

## CHAPTER V: OUTCOME

When we come back from a road trip, one of the first things we do as a family is look at the photos. Looking back on the photos, we see things we forgot about or things we did not see at the time because we were focused on another aspect of the trip. Sometimes, we experience disappointment over places we should have travelled, sights we should have seen, and trips which were cut short for whatever reason. Regardless of our experience we will all look back on the trip with a mixture of fondness, frustration, humor, humility and hopefully, gratitude.

Looking back over the journey, we will often have more clarity than we did while we were on the journey. This chapter is an attempt to provide some clarity to the No Drop Ride journey. What did we learn, what challenged us, and did our experience affect our perspective on Jesus, ourselves, and each other? This chapter will include the perspectives of the sojourners who were on the No Drop Ride. It will include their pictures and perspectives from the journey.

I sampled two groups for this project. The first group consisted of members of the team responsible for creating the No Drop Ride metaphor. The second group included a diverse sample from the congregation. The information was collected through two primary mediums. The first medium included a questionnaire accompanied by a two and one half hour focus group which I facilitated. This group consisted of the No Drop Ride Team as well as individuals from within the congregation. In total, 27 individuals participated in the questionnaire. The breakdown is as follows:



Males in 20s (1)	Females 20s (0)
Males in 30s (5)	Females 30s (3)
Males in 40s (1)	Females 40s (3)
Males in 50s (5)	Females 50s (4)
Males in 60s (2)	Females 60s (1)
Males in 70s (1)	Females 70s (1)

As seen, the highest concentration of participants were in their thirties, forties and fifties. It is interesting to note that the biggest divide in language before we started the No Drop Ride Project was with the thirty and fifty-somethings. These two age groups struggled to understand each other.

I created 33 questions using the Likert Scale, hoping to glean qualitative data from the participants. For the No Drop Ride participants, I included five supplemental questions which dealt with their experience with the collaborative process as well as areas where we could have improved the process. Through the information gleaned from these groups I assessed the metrics of the No Drop Ride Project on the church's ability to create a shared definition of discipleship, foster community, and make disciples. Specifically, I looked at the limiting aspects of the project as well as the positive impact on our ability to accomplish the above mentioned.

One of the limitations we experienced in assessing the project was that we did not start with a clear reference point from which to contrast. This made the results from the assessment less precise. We started with the understanding that we needed a shared metaphor from which to operate, but did not explore the overall spiritual and emotional health of the congregation prior to starting the project. In other words, we did not measure the spiritual maturity of the church

prior to and after the No Drop Ride. Because of this, it was difficult to differentiate between causation and correlation with the project's impact.

As I assessed all of the feedback from the focus group as well as the individual questionnaires, one consistent theme emerged: the No Drop Ride Project did not have enough time to fully change the church culture. While this does not mean it was a failure, as I will discuss later, it does mean that two and a one half years was not sufficient time to change a church culture. In other churches I have observed that it takes anywhere from 5-8 years to change a church culture.

Because of the lack of time, many felt that the No Drop Ride operated more like an initiative rather than a culture defining/shaping tool. As an initiative, it was inspiring, but lacked the necessary ongoing commitment which may have led to increased momentum needed to transform a community. While most of those who participated in the No Drop Ride expressed that the metaphor had a positive impact on their own understanding of discipleship and community, they questioned its overall effectiveness in shaping the culture.

When asked the question, "What would you tell another church who chooses to go through a similar process as the No Drop Ride?" One of the focus group members who is versed in product development in their career stated,

	I would challenge the church to review their past practices for new initiatives. Do they conduct a "post mortem" on projects like this immediately after launch and again six months after launch? The
what didn't it's easy	'post mortem' allows the team to identify what went well, go well and how the process can be improved. In business to spend five (5) years on product development, five (5)

weeks on  
launch.<sup>1</sup>

packaging creation and five (5) minutes on product

This participant accurately summarized one of the limitations of the project. While the process for the No Drop Ride Project did not precisely conform to this generalization, there were some parallels. First, we did not conduct a series of “post mortem” assessments immediately after the project.<sup>2</sup> An earlier and staged assessment would have granted us more precision with measuring metrics for the program. One of the reasons for this oversight was the very positive experience of the “early adopters” who loved the project and became ambassadors within the church community for its acceptance. Unfortunately, this led some of us in official leadership positions to confirmation bias, causing us to see only the positive impacts of the project. Second, we did not spend enough time thinking through the public roll out of the No Drop Ride Project, which limited the institutionalizing of the metaphor.

One observation gleaned from the feedback was that the language for Westbrook’s stated mission competed with the No Drop Ride Metaphor. Westbrook’s mission statement was “We make it our aim to be a growing community Discovering Jesus, Developing as His disciples, and Deploying in His service.” We referred to this as our 3D Mission. The mission statement was intended to be a general reference flowing out of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. As stated, the purpose behind the No Drop Ride

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The *No Drop Ride* project was first launched to the congregation in fall of 2014. The most recent feedback from the focus group and individual questionnaires were received in spring of 2017.

metaphor was to provide a more detailed definition for discipleship. The mission was answering the question of what we are called to do, whereas the metaphor answered the question of who we are. While this distinction seemed clear in the minds of the No Drop Ride Team, many in the congregation struggled to make the connection.

Another observation from the project was that the metaphor was too etherial. One of the participants articulated this by stating, “The process results in somewhat of a philosophical or even idealistic result versus a tangible one.”<sup>3</sup> This same individual went on to state, “I personally don’t believe that the outcome reflected the congregations’s true intentions or desires, but rather an idealistic model that people wouldn’t commit to. Perhaps there was more desire for the concept than there was for the execution?”<sup>4</sup> This individual’s feedback may reflect some of the internal challenges of right brain/left brain thinking, as well as a preference for focusing on strategy over culture.

We also received some feedback from participants who spoke with other congregants who were not a part of the focus group and who did not fill out a questionnaire. Although this feedback was more anecdotal, it was still helpful to get a pulse on how others in the congregation might have interpreted the metaphor. One such comment was that the bicycle imagery did not connect with some people. One individual felt the image of the bicycle conveyed an individual sport rather than a team sport.<sup>5</sup> One of the participants suggested that for future

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017 regarding an another congregant’s feedback from the metaphor.

projects we might consider widening the circle of congregants in order to give people more sense of ownership in the outcome.

One of the inherent limitations of the No Drop Ride was that it did not produce immediate results that could have alleviated the debt. The strength and weakness of the No Drop Ride Project was that it was process-oriented, which demanded space and time in order to reach its potential. One participant observed this challenge by stating,

It is awkward for people who are professional church goers. Because all of a sudden you are asked to be a part of something intimate and you are kind of just like, no. And that is why we couldn't steal enough Christians from other churches to create the illusion that our building made sense. If we were targeting professional Christians we might have had a chance, but our goal wasn't to do that, it was to create this community that wasn't going to grow fast enough which was our curse in a sense.<sup>6</sup>

The environment that was created through the No Drop Ride elevated the expectation from the congregation to be more involved through the use of their time, talents and treasures. Another participant shared, "The power of the metaphor is that it allowed us to BE the church rather than GO to church."<sup>7</sup> Many Christians in our community were perfectly comfortable in going to church, and struggled with increased expectations.

While the metaphor provided language and imagery that connected the generations, we still had to address the elephant in the room, the debt. The debt associated with the building limited our ability to take the necessary time for the metaphor to soak into the fabric of the church community. Even though we were

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

faithfully paying down the debt, it was unclear what the bank would choose to do once the terms of the loan were due.

The existing congregation had made a strong financial commitment to paying down the debt, but were also feeling taxed by this. Additional people were needed to help carry the financial burden of the church. To make matters even more challenging, we were not targeting “mature” Christians from other churches who had a strong track record of generosity. Westbrook was attracting newer, younger disciples who had not fully committed to financial giving. The debt was continuing to plague Westbrook and there was no clear immediate way out.

I found out from a friend that Elmbrook Church was interested in possibly planting a church or opening a multi-site near Westbrook Church. The leadership of Elmbrook stated with this friend that they had concerns because Westbrook was already located in the community. The reason the Elmbrook leaders were interested was that many in their congregation lived in the same community as Westbrook.<sup>8</sup> The two churches already shared a strong relationship because Elmbrook Church was the original sending church which planted Westbrook Church 34 years ago.

I decided to initiate a meeting with Jason Webb, the senior pastor of Elmbrook Church, to discuss the possibility of a church partnership or merger.<sup>9</sup> Jason and I have been friends for 9 years and have established a strong mutual trust in each other. In addition the two churches shared a strong missional DNA.

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<sup>8</sup> Elmbrook and Westbrook Churches are only 20-25 minutes apart.

<sup>9</sup> Jason Webb is the senior pastor of Elmbrook Church, a globally significant, multi-site church of 6,000, staff of 125, and 80 missionaries in Brookfield, WI. Jason resides in Milwaukee, WI with wife Heather and their four kids.

Jason and I agreed that we might be able to accomplish more if we combined our resources and join the two churches in some fashion.

Jason had expressed to me his vision of launching ten multi-site and church plants within first five years. This was a bold vision and as I shared it with the Westbrook Elders and Pastors there was interest in joining in this endeavor. When Jason arrived at Elmbrook in 2014, the church had been debt free for over 14 years. Elmbrook Church had tremendous financial and leadership resources which would enable the two churches able to accomplish more together than separate.

The discussion first centered on combining the two churches, which would allow Westbrook to assist in the vision of planting churches in partnership with Elmbrook and have its debt relieved. In addition, Westbrook had created a healthy leadership culture and Elmbrook recognized it. The hope was that the joining of our two churches would take the best of both churches financially and culturally and combine them into something synergistically stronger. We knew that the momentum generated by the No Drop Ride metaphor would potentially be compromised or even eradicated through the merger. There was hope that aspects of the No Drop Ride metaphor, or at least the process Westbrook took to formulate it would be adopted by the Elmbrook Church leadership.

After months of discussion, prayer and logistical work, both churches universally agreed to merge. The entire process for the merger was almost nine months. Prior to the merger I had decided, and Jason agreed, that I would step down as Senior Pastor. Jason and I agreed that both campuses should have one

senior pastor. Elmbrook would eventually hire a campus pastor whose primary responsibility was to shepherd the flock and teach occasionally. My decision also allowed me to move my family back to our home state of California to be closer to our extended family. Both Westbrook and Elmbrook Church showed my family and me a generous send off.

My last Sunday at Westbrook Church fell on the 33 year celebration of Westbrook Church. I invited the founding pastor, Mike Frans to return for the final celebration and closing of Westbrook Church.<sup>10</sup> My hope was that having Mike, and his wife Jan would facilitate reconciliation between the Frans' and Westbrook. The two of them stepped onto the stage and were recognized for their 25 years of service at Westbrook. They received a standing ovation from the Westbrook congregation. It was a powerful morning for everyone and healed any existing wounds between the two parties.

A year has passed since the merger and Westbrook is now Elmbrook Lake Country. Sadly, the No Drop Ride metaphor "got dropped." While the leadership of Elmbrook Church liked the concept of the No Drop Ride, they felt their current metaphor of Rooted and Released should be maintained since they were its formulators.<sup>11</sup> This was difficult for the Westbrook community but also understood. While the larger church did not have any debt restraining them, their church culture and size has limited their ability to adopt aspects of the No Drop Ride metaphor. Because of the scale of their operation (6000 attendees), product

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to founding Westbrook Church, Mike Frans founded Grace Church in Delafield, WI where he is currently pastoring.

<sup>11</sup> Jason Webb, the Senior Pastor of Elmbrook was especially complimentary of the *No Drop Ride* metaphor.



(numerical growth) remained a predominant marker for spiritual health and success, rather than the No Drop Ride focus which focused more on the process of discipleship. This shift has proven to be jarring for former Westbrook people. One focus group participant and co-creator of the metaphor shared their disappointment in the following way,

Overall, I'm not satisfied with the outcome because it isn't a part of our church culture today. Even though our (current) Senior Pastor referenced it from the pulpit in 'glowing terms' it's been shelved; like so many initiatives before it: 'TO KNOW HIM & MAKE HIM KNOWN'... 'DISCOVER-DEVELOP-DEPLOY.' It seems that every leadership change brings with it the need for new messaging. YIKES!<sup>12</sup>

This individual's feedback seemed to reflect a general consensus from many.

It is difficult to determine from the focus group and questionnaire alone what the missional impact is from the No Drop Ride Project. One statement posed to the participants was, "I am finding it easier to connect with people who don't know Jesus in spiritual conversations." The biggest section of the respondents answered either "Agree" (15) or "Undecided" (7). There were two outliers who answered "Strongly Agree" (3) and "Disagree" (2). While the results were tipped in favor of those who agreed with the statement, less than half that number were not sure. Following in a similar vein, people responded to the following statement, "The No Drop Ride metaphor led to an increased love for others inside and outside of the church," by stating Strongly Agree (6), Agree (13), Undecided (6) and Disagree (2). While it may be difficult to ascertain

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

causation and correlation, it appears that the metaphor helped rather than hindered our ability to reach people for Jesus, making it a net gain.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the metaphor which they noted avoided overt Christian language when discussing faith with others. Some expressed their excitement when they engaged in conversation with non-Christians about spiritual matters. They appreciated the metaphor for providing them with universally accessible language. From this standpoint, the language did appear to make the prospect of entering into spiritual conversations less challenging than prior to the No Drop Ride Project.

Another limitation with the No Drop Ride Project revealed in the feedback was that it required a unique culture to support it. One participant expressed that, “access to the leadership (elders and pastors) made the project successful.”<sup>13</sup> They acknowledged that may not always be the case in many churches. Another participant shared that the project was possible because the positional “leaders (Elders and Pastors) were willing to return the authority to the congregation.”<sup>14</sup> Many agreed in the focus group that the flat leadership model is not normative in most churches or institutions.

The No Drop Ride would be difficult to universally reproduce because it might be dependent on the personal culture of those who are leading. One participant offered this feedback to me personally.

As we were thinking about the No Drop Ride we decided the No Drop Ride is really who you are and how you lead our little flock. I

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

think the No Drop Ride terminology is great but really I think the No Drop Ride is a reflection of your heart.<sup>15</sup>

While I was touched by the sentiment of this feedback, I was also challenged by the statement. The purpose of the project was to attempt to create a culture of discipleship not dependent on the senior leader(s). Even though I was not a part of the initial creation, the project still flowed out of the values I implemented as the lead pastor. This is something we attempted to avoid, but in the end still struggled to do so.

Even though there were limitations to the No Drop Ride Project observed there were many positive results. The most important take-away was that we were able to create a shared definition for discipleship which enabled the church to become more effective at discipleship. The No Drop Ride metaphor gave the participants of all ages sampled (20-70), a greater understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Eighty-five percent of those who responded to the questionnaire stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the No Drop Ride gave them a greater personal understanding of discipleship. In addition, this same 85% also agreed that the No Drop Ride metaphor had a positive impact on Westbrook's corporate ability to make disciples. One focus group participant responded by stating, "Did it (No Drop Ride metaphor) enable us to disciple better? Is almost like a hard question, but not because we were discipling better but because we were finally in a culture that allowed discipleship to actually happen."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

One of the most significant things we learned from the project was that both the process and project created a sense of spiritual equality among the congregation. This was accomplished by creating common language, rather than insider language. One participant stated that the No Drop Ride metaphor was not “mired down with spiritual lingo.”<sup>17</sup> Another stated that the “No Drop Ride made Westbrook approachable for me. [It] made me feel like I fit in. Everyone fits in.”<sup>18</sup> Another participant and metaphor team member stated that the “No Drop Ride gave a visual framework as well as a verbal framework that was not full of ‘Christian-ese’ buzz words that often are a turn off or hard to understand for many.”<sup>19</sup> The metaphor enabled us to create level spiritual ground rather than creating different classifications of Christians (e.g., mature and immature).

The metaphor was quickly adopted by many in the church in large part because of the No Drop Ride team’s ownership of the project. After the completion of the metaphor, the team began spreading the No Drop Ride to their circles of influence. These individuals had a unique reach into the congregation, which accelerated the acceptance of the metaphor. One of the co-creators of the metaphor stated that the metaphor “gave me a sense of ownership and pride when explaining the concept to others because I felt I had a part in birthing this new idea for the church.” Another co-creator shared, “The benefit of the process for me was collaboration and I do believe that creativity was stimulated in the process. I found that to be exciting and there was a very human response.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

The project revealed that the No Drop Ride language reinforced the existing discipleship culture rather than redefining it. The success of the No Drop Ride was that it provided language for something which already existed. In other words, the metaphor was not designed to create an alternate reality, but describe what we were already doing. The metaphor was an honest appraisal of where people were on their spiritual journey rather than an idealized one. Our facilitator Greg Marshall stated, “The process is aspirational and honest to who you are. Brilliant insights are discovering what is already there.”<sup>21</sup> One participant affirmed, “We were humble and aware of our own humanity. We were not trying to portray ourselves as perfect people.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the theological foundations we were operating from as a church was the New Testament Concept of family (oikos). Questions were included in the questionnaire which were designed to reveal the ability of the No Drop Ride metaphor to display Westbrook’s ability to consistently live out the “One Another’s” in the New Testament. These were self-referencing questions which were intended to reveal the quality of the relationships in the church as well as corporate spiritual growth. One focus group participant stated, “I had to learn to love the people in my church which I co-existed with first and practice it within our group. It was going to take more time before it became an extension of who I am hopefully becoming.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Greg Marshall, May 6, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

There was a strong consensus from the No Drop Ride participants surveyed that revealed Westbrook was consistently serving God and each other lovingly and faithfully.<sup>24</sup> For some the No Drop Ride provided greater connection with the larger church community in a way they previously had not connected. One participant expressed “For me, the process helped me feel more connected to the wider church community. It gave me a shared story with individuals and groups I didn’t interact with all the time.”<sup>25</sup> Not only did the No Drop Ride allow individuals to feel more connected to the larger church, after two years of living with the No Drop Ride metaphor, 70 percent of the congregation were participating in Life Groups. Many of these Life Groups began opening their doors to believers and non-believers alike. While we did not have enough time or feedback to determine how effective these groups were at reaching people far from God, one participant expressed, “There was an expectation that you would use your gifts and resources to serve others within and outside the church.”<sup>26</sup>

The No Drop Ride Project helped increase overall community participation. Specifically, many of the focus group participants shared how the creation of the No Drop Ride empowered the congregation. A “flat leadership” model was created rather than a hierarchal model which was dependent on church staff and “official” leaders. One of the participants commented on this “flat leadership” model by sharing how including the congregation in the creation of

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<sup>24</sup> Eighty to ninety percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the Westbrook community’s ability to consistently live out the One Another’s (Questions 7-25).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

the No Drop Ride metaphor avoided an unnecessary “spiritual hierarchy.” The focus group participants shared how this was a strength of the process.<sup>27</sup>

Delegating responsibility and returning authority to the congregation was more than a perception; it became a reality. One individual shared a contrasting, previous experience at another church when a senior pastor charged another group with a similar project only to retract support of the team at the last minute when they did not agree with the group’s final product. The strength of the No Drop Ride was that we created buy-in on the front end and at the back end which allowed the process to work properly.

The increased community participation appeared to also translate into an increased collective responsibility to commit to other people’s spiritual growth. Many people in the focus group stated that there was an increased appreciation and awareness of those on the journey alongside them which made it more difficult to give up on people. One No Drop Ride participant stated,

This No Drop Ride process allows me to meet with guys like \_\_\_\_ for endless hours in a messy scenario that there is no good answer to, and that is discipleship. And there is not always a Billy Graham that is left behind out doing his thing.<sup>28</sup>

Another participant stated, “There are times when I may have given up on someone and stopped trying to invest in them. However, the No Drop Ride is so engrained in me that I can’t just walk away from them.”<sup>29</sup> Another shared, “I became more aware of how we are all in different places in our journey and to be

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

conscious of that and more willing to love people no matter where they are.”<sup>30</sup>

One participant emphasized, “It became much more difficult to give up on people, especially the more difficult people to reach in the church.”<sup>31</sup> All of these individuals seem to represent the majority of the experience of those who responded to the questionnaire and focus group.

The No Drop Ride Project was especially impactful for people in the Westbrook community who were “broken down on the side of the road.” One such individual had been a part of the Westbrook community for many years, but he and his wife had always been reluctant to join a Life Group. They finally decided to join a group and a month after joining, he lost his job. When his life group found out that he had lost his job they surprised him with a laptop computer which he could use to look for jobs. Additionally, he shared how several of the men in the group contacted him every day to see how he was doing and to encourage him. The love and support experienced from the group profoundly impacted his wife and him.

The value of the No Drop Ride became most visible and tangible when two Westbrook families lost family members. One of these families lost their young adult son in a tragic car crash along with another young man. Sadly, Westbrook Church had lost six other young adults in its 33 year history, many of them occurring within the past ten years. This family was surrounded by their Life Group and the Westbrook Church community during this time of grief. Both became an extended oikos for this grieving family. A couple of months after the

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.



loss of his son, the father of this young man became a contributor to the No Drop Ride Team. His participation had a profound impact on shaping the language of the No Drop Ride. He shared with the focus group how it took every ounce of strength to attend the meeting, but how much he personally benefited from the process. In his words,

The final draft gave me a picture of what discipleship really means. [It] reminded me that we are walking through time together and are all needed or in need of one another. We're not called to be 'best friends' but we are called to care for one another.<sup>32</sup>

The other family I mentioned lost their father and husband to brain cancer at 46 years of age. To add to the devastation, a year earlier, the wife had a stroke weeks after giving birth to their daughter. Because of her stroke, this new mother could not even hold her child. As the family was beginning to adjust to their mom regaining her speech and other physical abilities, their father was diagnosed with stage four brain cancer and was told he had only a couple of months to live.

The No Drop Ride language had a profound impact on the family. During this season and even now, the family will express their appreciation for Westbrook Church by stating of their experience, "It's a No Drop Ride." When I asked if she would share her family's story she expressed her gratitude by stating,

When I had my stroke Westbrook took care of my family. They cooked meals, cleaned the house, took care of my children and prayed for us. They didn't 'leave us behind.' Again just 1 year later they (Westbrook community) came to our rescue when my husband was diagnosed with a brain tumor.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

She shared how her family's experience of being loved by God through the people of Westbrook allowed them all to be more open about sharing the love of God in Christ.

It (No Drop Ride) definitely had a positive impact on my spiritual growth. Outside the church, it increased my love for others (my family) and people in our work place. We could talk about God's mercies and blessings with those people like never before.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the feedback we received from both the questionnaires and the focus group expressed how integral the experience of loving this family was in terms of their own spiritual growth. Many suggested an entire chapter be devoted to this family and their experience on the No Drop Ride. As the former pastor of this church, I am incredibly proud of the how the church Rode Together, Trained Together and Cheered One Another On. Well done, Westbrook Church!

Overall, the results show that there was a significant internal impact on the Community as a result of the No Drop Ride Project. The exact impact is difficult to determine, in part, because there was no reference point established prior to the project. One participant shared, "We feel like pioneers who were not able to experience the fruit of their labor."<sup>35</sup> Even though it is hard to measure everything that emerged from the project, there appears to have been a significant existential impact on those who participated in it. It was and is more than a slogan or strategy for how to be the church.

The No Drop Ride has come to represent a culture for discipleship, one that those who participated cannot easily abandon no matter how far away they

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with focus group participant, May 6, 2017.

are from it. The process, resultant imagery and language, for me, and for many others, has become the new reference point for how to be the church. I share the sentiment of many who expressed, every time they see a bike they automatically think of discipleship. The No Drop Ride has become a beautiful picture of the journey we are all on to love God and each other.

My hope is that this thesis-project will help other churches and church leaders to formulate a process for developing a common language for discipleship. The principles of this project could be universally applied in any church or organization. For example, the process Westbrook engaged in, that is including the congregations in the shaping process, will be beneficial for other church leaders. The strength of the project was not only the end product of the No Drop Ride metaphor, but the beauty that emerged from the process itself. There is universal application for churches and other organizations which can be gleaned from the thesis-project.

It is my hope that this thesis-project will also be used as a primer to explore how individuals interpret information, especially as it is represented in metaphorical form. I have included some additional resources in the bibliography gleaned from Ian McGilchrist concerning the psychology of the brain, and specifically right brain left brain integration and differentiation. In addition, the interested reader of this thesis-project can use the work to understand more deeply the need for change to be linguistic.

From a theological standpoint, this work can first be used to explore the theological foundation for discipleship as a learner, follower, and imitators of

Jesus. Secondly, the product can inform those interested in more fully understanding the ecclesiological foundation of church as family, oikos. This thesis-project will offer help to modern church leaders, especially in North America, a Biblical alternative to the consumeristic, and “attractional” models many churches have adopted. Thirdly, the thesis-project may help aid those who are asking similar questions about how to effectively connect intergenerational audiences in the church.

I will use what I learned through the thesis-project to help other churches who are finding roadblocks to spiritual growth based on preconceived ideas about discipleship. As a pastor and consultant I plan on consulting churches on how to create healthy church cultures where discipleship is intentional and not accidental. I plan on using some of the universal findings in this thesis-project within the secular context, to help companies find better systems of apprenticing leaders and creating healthier leadership cultures.

In chapter one, I shared that my preaching coach, Tom Nebel, suggested I listen to country music in order to become a better preacher. I mentioned that, after following his advice, I came across the song Automatic by the country music artist, Miranda Lambert. This is the song where she beckons the listener to travel back in time with her, a time when most things did not come as easily to us as they do now. She sings the refrain with a country conviction, “Cause when everything is handed to you, it’s only worth as much as the time put in.”<sup>36</sup> This is

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<sup>36</sup> Lambert, Miranda, RCA Record Label 88883-79278-2, 2014, compact disk.

more than homiletical gold, it was also true of my experience with this thesis-project.

While only God knows what eternal impact will result from the hard work put into the creation and nurturing of the No Drop Ride, it created a significant impact on those who experienced the results. I believe the time put into this thesis-project and the pursuit of making disciples was a net gain. I am one who was deeply impacted by my experience as a disciple who embarked on the No Drop Ride journey. For seven years and ten months, we rode together, trained together and cheered one another on. I am a different person as a result of having gone through this entire process, and I now have the high privilege of calling these people my friends and family. It truly is a No Drop Ride.

## APPENDIX A

Gender:

Age:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The process for defining discipleship as a No Drop Ride has given me a greater understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I am increasingly allowing God's Word to shape the way I think and respond to those around me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I learning how to integrate emotional health and spiritual growth into my conversations with people I trust.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Over the past 5 years I have learned to be more patient with my family, friends and co-workers.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. When I see another person with a need I am more likely to get involved in helping meeting their need than I was a year ago.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I am finding it easier to connect with people don't know Jesus in spiritual conversations.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. As a participant of the No Drop Ride, I experienced community as described in Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35.

(From the list below, we the Westbrook community, consistently lived out the "One Another's" provided in the New Testament.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Love One Another (John 13:24&35)

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Be Devoted to and Show One Another Honor (Romans 12:10)

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Live in Unity with One Another (Romans 15:5&6)

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Accept One Another (Romans 15:7)

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Instruct One Another (Romans 15:14)

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. Teach & Admonish One Another (Colossians 3:16)

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. Encourage and Building One Another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Greeting One Another with a Holy Kiss (Romans 16:16)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Serving One Another (Galatians 5:13)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Bearing With One Another (Ephesians 4:2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Being Kind to and Forgiving One Another (Ephesians 4:32)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Submit to One Another (Ephesians 5:21)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Spurring One Another On (Hebrews 10:24&25)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. Confessing our sins to One Another (James 5:16)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Praying for Each Other (James 5:16)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. Practice Hospitality to One Another (1 Peter 4:9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. Carrying One Another's Burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. Using our Gifts to Benefit One Another (1 Peter 4:10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I feel like I am missed and miss out when I am unable to attend corporate worship services and my Life Group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. People often comment on the positive change that has taken place in my life over the past 5 years.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. The No Drop Ride language and focus had a positive impact on Westbrook's effectiveness in making disciples (Please feel free to provide some personal examples below.).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. The No Drop Ride language and focus had a negative impact on Westbrook's effectiveness in making disciples.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I witnessed an increased sense of "belonging" from those who joined the No Drop Ride.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I experienced a heightened expectation for spiritual growth in the congregation as a result of the No Drop Ride. (Please feel free to provide some personal examples below.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. The No Drop Ride metaphor led to an increased love for others inside and outside of the church (Please feel free to provide some personal examples below.).

\_\_\_\_\_ 33. The No Drop Ride definition for discipleship and subsequent ministry that followed caused me to question my previously held understandings of discipleship.

(Supplemental Questions for Metaphor Team Only)

34. What personal effect did the development of the No Drop Ride metaphor have on you as a co-creator in terms of your own spiritual journey?

35. What thoughts or opinions do you have about the process? What were the challenges? What were the benefits? What were you most excited about?

36. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being “not at all” and 5 being “extremely”) what is your level of satisfaction with the outcome?

37. What was the most satisfying aspect of the project from your perspective?

38. What would you tell another church who chooses to go through a similar process?



# APPENDIX B

## No Drop Ride Questionnaire Results

Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24	Q 25	Q 26	Q 27	Q 28	Q 29	Q 30	Q 31	Q 32	Q 33	
5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	2	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	1	5	5	4	5	M 30
4	5	3	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	1	5	4	4	4	F 30
5	5	3	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	4	3	3	5	3	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	2	3	2	4	4	3	4	*M 60
4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	2	4	4	4	4	*F 50
4	3	5	5	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	1	3	4	3	2	*M 30
4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	*M 30
4	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	5	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	M 50
5	5	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	1	4	4	4	1	F 50
5	5	4	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	1	5	5	4	3	M 40
2	5	4	5	4	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	3	4	4	4	5	3	3	4	4	3	5	4	3	1	3	4	4	3	F 40
5	3	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	3	5	2	5	4	5	5	F 30
5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	1	5	4	5	2	M 30
2	4	4	3	2	3	1	4	3	4	3	5	4	4	2	4	4	2	3	4	2	5	3	4	4	4	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	*M 50
3	5	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	2	4	5	5	4	3	3	4	5	4	3	—	3	4	2	3	4	4	3	M 70
4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	3	4	5	3	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	2	4	3	4	3	F 70
4	4	4	4	—	4	—	4	4	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	—	5	1	5	4	4	M 60
4	4	5	5	3	3	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	3	4	2	4	4	3	*F 60
4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	2	4	3	2	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	4	1	2	3	2	*M 50
4	4	2	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	1	4	5	4	5	M 20
5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	1	4	5	5	M 50

Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24	Q 25	Q 26	Q 27	Q 28	Q 29	Q 30	Q 31	Q 32	Q 33		
3	5	5	5	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	2	3	3	3	4	3	2	F 50
4	4	3	2	4	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	3	4	2	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	1	5	4	4	2	M 30	
4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	1	5	5	5	1	F 30
5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	1	4	4	5	4	F 40
5	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	5	4	3	4	3	3	4	2	4	4	3	2	M 50	
4	4	3	5	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	F 50	
5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	1	5	5	5	5	F 40

Q1-33 (No Drop Ride Questions); Participants Gender and Age(Right hand column); \*NDR Participant

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## VITA

The author of this work is Patrick (Scott) Grabendike. Mr. Grabendike was born in Ventura, California, on April 16, 1972. After graduating from high school, he attended Westmont College in Montecito, California, and majored in Social Science with a minor in Religious Studies. After graduation from Westmont College, he entered full-time vocational ministry, and enrolled at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he completed an M.Div in May 2004. He has lived in Denver, Colorado, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He has served in the American Baptist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Presbyterian Church and most recently a non-denominational church.

Mr. Grabendike began his studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts in 2008. He is expected to graduate in May, 2018. He is currently working with GiANT Worldwide as a leadership consultant. He and his wife, Kara, and two kids, Caleb (19) and Chloe (17), reside in Camarillo, California.